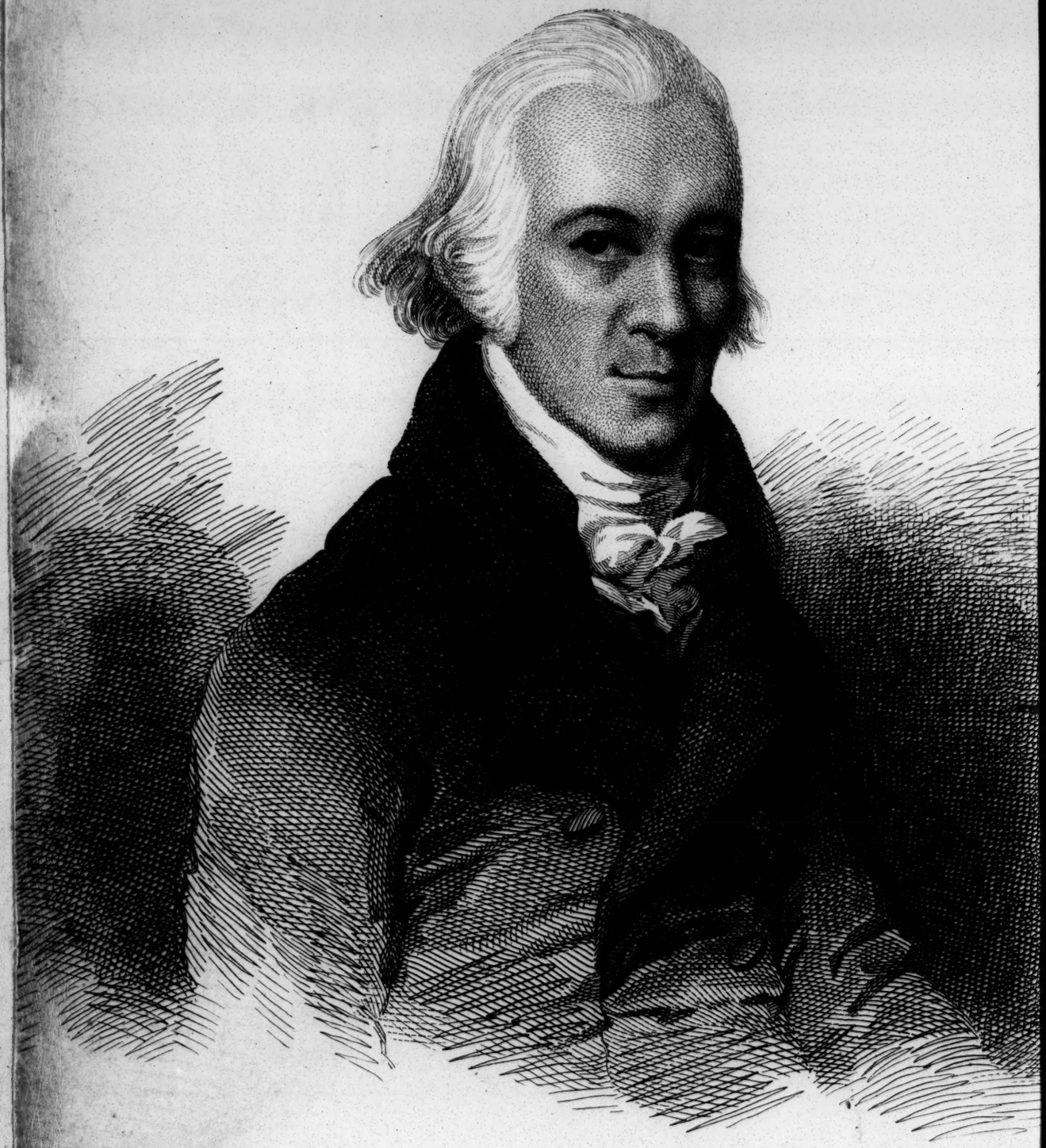


12

DISCOURSES

TO

ACADEMIC YOUTH.

By EDWARD PEARSON, B.D.

RECTOR OF REMPSTONE, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE; AND LATE TUTOR OF SIDNEY-SUSSEX COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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MDCCXCVIII.

BRITISH MUSEUM
DIEU ET MON DROIT

TO THE

REV. WILLIAM ELLISTON, D.D.

MASTER OF SIDNEY-SUSSEX COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

SIR,

SINCE it is to You, that I am indebted for my appointment to the situation in the University, which gave occasion to my preaching these Discourses, as well as for the leisure, which I now enjoy, and which has afforded me the opportunity of preparing them for the press, I am naturally led to offer them to You, as a testimony of my gratitude *.

Independently, however, of this consideration, there is, in my judgment, a propriety sufficiently evident in dedicating a work, which has for its object the promoting of right principles and right conduct

* The Rectory of Rempstone is in the gift of the Master of Sidney-Sussex College, and the Author was presented to it by him, October 25, 1796.

conduct in Academic Youth, to One, who, for the space of near forty years, has, with distinguished ability, been endeavouring to promote the same object; and who, amidst various discouragements (that arising from the want of co-operation in Parents not the least) has unceasingly persevered in maintaining those restraints, so salutary in a course of education, which the manners of the age, gradually extending their influence into places of education, have a constant tendency to relax.

With sentiments of Respect,

Esteem, and Gratitude,

I am, Sir,

Your obliged Servant,

EDWARD PEARSON.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Discourses, which make up the present Volume, were preached before the University of Cambridge. It was the Author's view, in preaching them, to guard young men against those dangers, with respect both to moral practice and religious principles, to which an Academic life is more peculiarly exposed; and he now publishes them in the hope, that the perusal of them may contribute something to the same important purpose.

It is, perhaps, scarcely worth remarking, that the first five Discourses refer to moral practice, the last eight to religious principles.

The Author returns his thanks to the Syndics of the University-Press, for taking upon them the expence of paper and press-work.

REMPSTONE PARSONAGE,
MAY 1, 1798.

*** The reader is requested to correct the *errata* previously to his perusal of the book.

POSTSCRIPT.

IT is scarcely necessary for me to profess, that I entertain the highest respect for the University of Cambridge, and for the general mode of discipline and instruction observed there; and I hope it will not be deemed inconsistent with that respect, if I add, that the following regulations have long appeared to me as *desiderata*. It would not be difficult, I think, to point out many advantages, which might reasonably be expected to result from each. In any case, there will be no harm in proposing them as subjects for deliberation.

1. The abolition of all College feasts.
2. An uniformity of discipline in the different Colleges, with respect to Chapel, Gates, and Lectures.
3. A reduction of the time allotted to the study of Mathematics and Natural Philosophy from *three years and a quarter* to *two* years.

To these I would add a *fourth*, to which it more particularly concerns parents and guardians to attend, though it has not altogether escaped the notice of some members of the University; that is, not to admit a young man at any College, without an assurance of his being accommodated, immediately on going to reside, with apartments *within* the walls of it.

ERRATA.

PAGE

5. l. 11. *for* " scarce," *put* " scarcely."
7. l. 16. *for* " scarce," *put* " scarcely."
18. l. 10. *for* " what," *put* " which."
48. l. 13. *for* " scarce," *put* " scarcely."
53. l. 8. *dele* the inverted commas.
99. at bottom, the reference should be to *Discourse* II.
137. l. 7. *for* " with," *put* " of."
179. l. 8. *dele* " be led to."
184. l. 15. *put comma* before " with."
193. last line but one of the *Note*, remove *comma* from before " for," to before " at."
214. last line of the *Note*, *for* " council," *put* " counsel."

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DIS-

DISCOURSE I.

On the importance of a proper choice of company.

PROV. xiii. 20.

HE THAT WALKETH WITH WISE MEN, SHALL BE WISE; BUT A COMPANION OF FOOLS SHALL BE DESTROYED.

FEW things are of more importance to men in general, than the choice of associates. Our lives and manners naturally derive a tincture from those, with whom we frequently converse; nor is it less the result of reason and experience, than the sentence of inspiration, that as, with the wise and good, we shall be strengthened in wisdom and virtue, so, with sinners, we shall be led on by their enticements to destruction.

It has, accordingly, been the care of every society, duly mindful of the safety of its members, to guard them against the danger, to which the example of vicious men immediately in their view must necessarily expose them. The holy founder of our religion, indeed, during his abode on earth, did not scruple to converse with sinners. But this is a part of his character, which, if it belong not exclusively to himself, cannot safely be practised by the *generality* of his followers. In any case, it certainly is not required of any but those, whose office or character may lead them, like him, to converse with such persons in order to their amendment. Though the early converts to Christianity were so fully instructed in virtue, by the doctrines and precepts of their religion, and so strongly incited to it by its motives, and the recent evidences of its divine authority; it was yet thought necessary strenuously to exhort them not to encounter the temptation

tation to depart from virtue, which the associating with immoral professors of that religion would not fail to present. Our Saviour commands us, after we have in vain taken all reasonable means of recovering an offending brother, to separate ourselves from his society, and to consider him as "an heathen man and a publican." The Apostles also direct their disciples to "withdraw themselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of them." "I have written unto you," says St. Paul, "not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no not to eat." And, though these directions might primarily have in view the correction of *offending Christians*, by "putting them to shame;" since we are not forbidden "*altogether* to associate with the fornicators of this world, or with the

covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters;" that is, with persons of that description, who did not profess themselves Christians: yet they were also intended as cautions against the danger, which we should incur by such society, and the peculiar danger of holding communion with those, who, professing the same principles with ourselves, weaken the force of them upon us by "walking disorderly;" nor was it permitted those, to whom the Apostle immediately addressed himself, to keep company with *any*, who did so walk, but from the consideration, that, as circumstances then were, it was a thing of necessity, and that they otherwise "must needs go out of the world." This discipline, salutary both to the sound and corrupt parts of the community, was strictly observed also in the next succeeding ages of the Church, though, from the state of external circumstances, professed Christians were then much more likely to be real ones than at present.

But

But if to those, who, from conviction, had embraced the pure principles of the Gospel, and who might therefore be supposed of some stability in virtue, danger was to be apprehended from the contagion of ill examples; how much more reason is there to caution those against it, whose opinions and manners are chiefly formed by imitation; who, from the immaturity of their understandings, are scarce able to discern the right; and who, from the perversity of their inclinations, are disposed to pursue the wrong!

That this, in some degree or other, is the case of all young persons, though it needs no formal proof, is by no means sufficiently considered. I shall take occasion, therefore, from each of these grounds, to impress upon them a sense of the danger they incur, by associating with improper companions.

I. Though man was designed, in the progress of his existence, to rise to the character of a *rational* being, he evidently, at the beginning of life, has but little claim to the title. It is therefore expedient, if not absolutely necessary, that, till he arrive at it, he should be directed by some *inferior* principle, which, while it guards his immediate safety, may also further his improvement, and prepare him for acting a more exalted part. For this purpose nothing seems so well adapted as the principle of *imitation*, which holds a middle rank between instinct and reason, and partakes of the advantages of both. Had human beings been endued with instinct in equal perfection with many other animals, their *bodily* safety might have been preserved even with more certainty than at present; but, with respect to their intellectual and moral powers, though, so far as instinct had directed them, they could not have been wrong, yet they would also have been inca-

incapable of *merit* in being right, and consequently of any *reward* for being so: whereas, by the present disposition of things, though, at first, they imitate the actions of those around them without much consideration, they are soon led to perceive, from the good or bad consequences which follow, that it makes a great *difference* to them what model of conduct they imitate. It is indeed true, that, even when disposed to discriminate, they may often be prevented, by the circumstances of their situation, from choosing such a model as they ought, or even such as will satisfy themselves; but they can scarce avoid attaining to a sense of the *importance* of a right choice, and to the habit of exercising some caution in choosing. This will bring them, by degrees, to act with reference to the *consequences* of their actions. Where there is a favourable disposition, this conviction and conduct will soon have their proper effect. The imperfection of all

human characters, and the infinitely varied situations occurring in life, will not fail to teach him, who is desirous of doing right, the insufficiency of the principle of imitation, even when applied with caution, to direct him in *every* instance. At length, he will arrive at the conviction, that his conduct, in order to his welfare and happiness, must be directed by a rule, which, independently of a sanction from the practice of others, himself has previously approved; and he will become, as was intended, no longer a merely *imitative*, but a *rational* being.

Be this, however, as it may, the fact itself, that young persons are much influenced by the behaviour of their associates, will not, I presume, be disputed. The desire of a favourable reception is natural and laudable; and it is evident, that, in many cases, they have no other rule of action, which can ensure them a favourable reception in any particular

ticular company, than a conformity with the manners of those, who compose it. Nor is it to be expected, that they will rest satisfied with barely not meeting a repulse. They will probably go on to aspire after approbation and applause. In the early period of life, one of the strongest motives of conduct is the expected praise of those, who are to be our immediate observers and judges. Accordingly, the *rule* of it, as the most likely to lead to that praise, is the conduct, which those observers and judges themselves pursue. Since, therefore, the characters of the young are thus, in great measure, formed by imitation; and since we cannot with reason expect, that the thing formed will be better than the model, after which it was constructed, there is need, surely, of the greatest care to present such models only to the view, as have some pretensions to excellence, and may be followed with a well-grounded prospect of advantageous result.

II. *Secondly;*

II. *Secondly;* the danger of bad examples to the young, and the consequent benefit of good ones, arises also from their *immaturity of judgment.* The principle of imitation, as I have already acknowledged, is the provision of nature; and is, therefore, by no means to be absolutely condemned. It is, indeed, owing to the depravity and perverseness of men, that it is not the most *sure,* as well as the most *easy* road to virtue. If the examples presented to us were such, as it is the duty of those, who are arrived at the use of reason, to present, there would, at least in the great instances of moral conduct, be little need of any other instruction, and little danger of our going materially wrong; and, even as things are at present, it is productive of advantages, which no other conceivable contrivance could produce. To obtain these advantages, however, in the highest degree, which we may reasonably expect, it is necessary, either that good examples only

only should be generally before us, or that we should be able, in each example, to discriminate the good from the bad. It is only with respect to the first of these, that advice can be of much avail. Of characters in the *whole* we may, at almost any period of life, form a judgment tolerably correct; as well from the estimation, in which they are generally held, as from a certain *manner*, not easily counterfeited, which virtue and vice are found respectively to assume. But, while our judgments are unformed and immature, it is not possible to distinguish in the *detail*, and with regard to particular actions, what is worthy of our approbation and imitation, and what we ought to reprobate and avoid. Young persons, from the very circumstance of being placed in a situation, where such a task is necessary, may easily be led into snares, from which no caution of their own could preserve them. Having suffered but little from

from deceit, their confidence is unchecked by suspicion; nor can they be brought to imagine, that a principle, which they feel as the dictate of nature, may possibly direct them wrong. They will probably follow where-ever their chosen leader shows the way; and thus, as the effect of their unfortunate choice, and by the misapplication of a salutary provision, may be practised in the habits of vice, before they are fully capable of moral discernment. It is, therefore, their duty to attend to what *is* in their power; to select for their associates, as much as circumstances will permit, those only, who may generally be imitated without much reserve. For, if they trust to their own judgment to determine, in particular cases, how far their imitation may be safely carried, there is every reason to apprehend, that it will not always stop, where they will afterwards have too much cause to think it ought.

III. But,

III. But, *thirdly*, it is also to be considered, that young persons are not only unable to discriminate properly between the good and the bad of a particular character, but naturally disposed to imitate the bad. It is an incontrovertible fact, however differently it may be accounted for, that there is in our nature a depravity, which strongly inclines us to such a gratification of our appetites and passions, as is inconsistent with our own general happiness, and with the happiness of others. To counteract this tendency, there is need of every check, which can from any quarter be supplied. How great, then, is the danger, if in that, by which the young must chiefly be directed, they not only find no check to the indulgence of their inclinations, but perpetual encouragement to indulge them! The spirit of disaffection is ready to enlist under any standard erected against lawful authority, and waits but for the signal of revolt to burst into avowed rebellion.

If

If young persons, themselves prone to evil, are accustomed to see instances, or to hear them related, in which their companions, perhaps with present impunity, indulge in any species of vice, they will gradually lose that abhorrence of vice, which, by other means, may have been instilled. The impressions of good counsel will form but a slender barrier against the invitations to disregard it, which the votaries of vice, either from the fulness of their hearts, or the desire of gaining new associates in their guilt, are so industrious to repeat. Abstinence from their company, my yet untainted friends, is the only security, on which you can depend. Retreat, while you yet are safe, from an atmosphere, which cannot long be breathed, without destroying the principle of life. Evil communications, if they are long continued, will in general corrupt even good manners, or at least prevent their further improvement; but, if the manners be not yet formed, or, if there be

be already a root of bitterness at the bottom, there is no hope of resisting the contagion. If, sensible of the danger of the situation, you still have the temerity to remain in it, you have a confidence of your stedfastness in virtue, which the experience of others certainly will not justify, and of which, when perhaps it is too late, you will probably have reason to repent. To take pleasure in the society of those, whom you feel yourself obliged to condemn, is itself a circumstance, which should quicken your alarm. It is at least an evidence, that by your *disposition* you are prepared to imitate their conduct, and withheld from it only by your apprehension of some immediate ill consequences. This apprehension may preserve you for a time; but familiarity with the danger will not fail to lessen it in your estimation, though in reality increased by its approach. Your apprehension will subside by degrees, and at length will deter you no more. You will lose

lose that detestation of vice, which, amidst all our depravity, is still inherent in the human heart. Without remorse, you will join your companions in what you formerly reprobated; and, while others are wondering at your hasty progress in vice, and lamenting your condition, you will imagine, that you are the same as before, or that, at most, you have only overcome the blamable bashfulness of youth. Thus, encouraged by the most insidious commendation, the like conduct of those, whom you are accustomed to consider as exemplars, you will probably be lulled into a wretched security, 'till some great calamity, the effect of your misconduct, awaken you to a sense of your real situation; a calamity which, though it cut not off all the inducements to repentance and amendment, may render it impossible for you to appear with credit on the stage of life. There are indeed instances, in which bad examples, either by the hateful picture of vice, which they immediately present,

present, or the dreadful ill consequences, which soon result from them, *deter* those, who are witnesses of them, from treading in the same steps; but these instances, not to mention that they may, in part, be referred to some *other* co-operating causes, are not frequent enough to encourage much dependence, and take place only in offences of the grosser kind.

Since, then, young persons, from a powerful principle of their nature, are thus led to imitate the actions of those, with whom they associate; and since, from the imbecility of their judgments, or the peryersity of their inclinations, they are in so great danger, either of imitating without a just discrimination, or with a view to some immediate gratification, it is incumbent on them, as they value their safety, to take care, that the love of jollity and mirth, or the vanity of mixing with the fashionable and gay, do not interfere with their duty of choosing

such companions only, as may prove patterns of virtuous conduct. In making this choice, *report* will go a considerable way to direct them. In the *moral* characters of the young, there is seldom any considerable mistake, whatever there may be with respect to their *intellectual* endowments and attainments. It is a matter, in which they do not usually practise much reserve, in what all men are competent to judge, and in which few can have any inducement to deceive.

I have already noticed the *peculiar* danger, which is to be apprehended from the society of those, who, professing the same principles with ourselves, disregard them in their conduct, thus setting the most pernicious example of acting contrary to acknowledged obligations. Now, this must necessarily be the case of those, to whom I would more particularly direct my admonitions. They do not associate with persons, who profess themselves infidels,

infidels, or defend immorality on system; against whom, therefore, they would be on their guard, and whom they would follow with suspicion at every step. Their companions are professors of the same pure principles with themselves. They are nominally disciples of Jesus Christ; and, if they are also possessed of some ability, they are often considered, by the inexperienced, as breaking the fetters of superstitious obligations, when, in reality, they are acting in opposition to their own convictions, and doing violence to their conscience.

It is further to be considered, that if, from a contagion so generally fatal, an individual, by the peculiar excellence of his disposition, the strength of his understanding, or the remaining influence of previous good instruction, should happen to escape; yet the danger is so generally acknowledged, that his escape will hardly be credited. Though he may prove to himself,

himself, that the maxim of Solomon has, in one instance, failed, he will not be able to persuade others to subscribe to the opinion; and he must suffer in his *reputation* at least, though his morals should remain untainted.

It may, perhaps, be objected, that, in cases where young people are brought, by the circumstances of their situation, to be frequently together, it is not easy, without a breach of politeness, to make such distinctions, as the advice now given seems necessarily to imply. To this it might be sufficient to answer, that, if there are cases, where politeness and duty interfere, no one, who is anxious to justify his conduct either to himself or to others, will hesitate which to prefer. But, are we reduced to this dilemma? Surely, there is a way of avoiding the company of wicked men, without infringing any laws, which honour compels us to observe. We may indeed, by retreating from

from their society, silently reprove them for their behaviour, and give occasion to a self-examination, which will be productive of no pleasing sensations. The consequence, however, will generally be referred to its true cause, and not to our intention of giving offence. Far from seeking to avoid this consequence, we should exert our endeavours to promote it. This is a method of discountenancing vice, which all are capable of practising; and, if practised as frequently as it ought to be, it would not fail to prove, except in the case of those hardened to insensibility, one of the most powerful incitements to amendment.

DISCOURSE II.

On the advantages of innocence *above* repentance.

ROM. vi. 1.

WHAT SHALL WE SAY THEN? SHALL WE CONTINUE IN SIN, THAT GRACE MAY ABOUND? GOD FORBID.

TO persons, who have been educated in the principles of Christianity, and long acquainted with its nature and design, it may, at first view, appear superfluous to be warned against the delusion, into which St. Paul was apprehensive some of the early converts might fall, of indulging in sin, under the pretext of magnifying God's favour in the forgiveness of it. We have now no need to be informed, that it is the design of the Gospel to

destroy sin; and that, if it effect not this, its promises can avail us nothing. We see the absurdity of applying what is said of *mankind in general*, before the method of salvation was made known to them, to the case of an *individual*, who presumes on the mercy of God in opposition to the condition, on which mercy has been promised. Yet, such is the deceitfulness of sin, on no better plea than this do we often shut our eyes to its deformity and danger; and, what we confess to be absurd in speculation, is still suffered to have considerable influence on our practice. Though we should scruple in direct terms to affirm, that, since the means of recovery from sin are provided, we may safely sin, while we do but preserve the intention of making use of those means at some future period; yet, by a *secret* and *silent* reference to the declared mercy of God to sinners, we often, it is to be feared, encourage ourselves in sin, and delude ourselves into the persuasion, that

our

our offences are more venial than they really are.

There is the more reason for this apprehension, from the reception which has been given to the opinion, that a person, who has been reclaimed from vice, is generally the best and most virtuous character; a maxim, which, with a small degree of extension, would, if admitted, justify the notion so strongly condemned by the Apostle. So far, indeed, as this opinion encourages the reformation of those, who have unhappily been the votaries of vice, it is productive of good, and may expect to be received with indulgence; though even then, without proper *limitation*, it may easily lead the penitent to a false estimate of his merit: but, if we consider it, where its operation may much more frequently be found, as suggesting a principle of conduct to those, who are beginning their career in life, we shall find it difficult to conceive

ceive an opinion of more pernicious tendency, or that is more deserving of reprobation. The duty required of man, though certainly *possible*, is yet not so easy as to permit him safely to *toy* with his power of performing it. To give an advantage to a formidable enemy, merely that we may reap more glory from our victory over him, is a hazardous experiment. The Gospel demands of us, at *every* period of life, the exertion of our best endeavours to bring forth fruit unto holiness. If, after knowing this, we fail of producing it, for want of that exertion, our case may be very different from that, to which we are so ready to compare it. What security have we, that we *shall* repent? Our recovery is difficult, in proportion as we offend against conviction; and, in any case, it supposes things, which we cannot command at our pleasure. Not to speak of the *uncertainty of life*, who shall say, when he enters on a course of sin, 'So far will I go, and no fur-

further?' Evil habits steal upon us before we are aware; and it often happens, by the change they imperceptibly produce in our sentiments, that we lose even the *desire* to be freed from them. We know not how soon we may arrive at that hardness of heart, on which moral considerations can make no impression, and from which a recovery may be hopeless. Angels, indeed, rejoice at the conversion of a sinner. They rejoice, however, not because penitence is better than innocence, but because penitence is the best thing in the sinner's power; and their rejoicing seems to imply, that the event was not of *certain* expectation. In support of this opinion, instances are sometimes alledged of those, who have been reclaimed from vice, and who, by their subsequent behaviour, have seemed to sanction a deviation from innocence. It is probable, however, that these instances are few, if compared with the numbers, who have deviated, and have not been re-

reclaimed; and, even of those who have, it is more than probable, that by far the greater part deviated, not by *principle*, but by *ignorance* or *passion*.

But it is not my intention, at present, to treat the subject in its most serious light, as involving our *future* and *eternal* safety; but, admitting the favourable supposition, that repentance *does* take place, to consider some of the respects, in which innocence is still to be preferred: meaning by innocence, as it is scarcely necessary to premise, not that spotless purity, to which a rational being is abstractedly obliged; but only that freedom from vicious habits, which the generality of men, taking them as they actually are, have the acknowledged power to preserve.

I. In the *first* place, the penitent returns to his duty under the disadvantage of having wasted part of his allotted time

of

of *discipline*. Whoever considers how much is to be done to bring a human being to the degree of excellence, of which he is capable, and how properly the attainment of that excellence is the object of our ambition, will not think this a consideration unworthy of his notice. Using all the diligence we can, we shall find no time to spare. To give reason that ascendency over our passions and affections, which is necessary to the full enjoyment of ourselves here, and to our admission into the society of perfected beings hereafter, there is need of long continued discipline, and long established habits of goodness. In general, our happiness will be proportionate to our moral improvement. We ought, therefore, to make all the improvement in our power. But, supposing that our ambition is not of the *highest* kind, that we are content to aim only at an inferior degree of happiness; yet we cannot be sure of obtaining even this, by employing less time in the

the preparation of ourselves, than is actually in our power to employ. Few among *us*, who have been instructed from our infancy in the knowledge of the Gospel, and repeatedly exhorted not to be "unfruitful in that knowledge," but to walk "worthy of our holy vocation;" few of us can reasonably apply to ourselves the case of those labourers in the vineyard, who, though they worked but one hour, were made equal to others, that had borne the burden and heat of the day. We must remember, that they were not so long idle through their *own fault*, but "because no man had hired them *."

II. Again; a reformed sinner lies under considerable disadvantage, with respect to his *health*, and his *fortune*. A certain portion of these is necessary, both to his own comfort, and to his being useful to others. Now, there are few vices, especially of those, to which young persons are

* See this subject more fully treated in Discourse III.

are addicted, that are not injurious to the *one* or the *other* of these, and the generality are injurious to *both*. If we will not be persuaded to be virtuous, till we have experienced the ill effects of vice, the experience will be often bought so dear, that no after frugality can make us compensation. If, when the sinner awakes from his lethargy, he finds his constitution impaired, and his fortune, if he possessed one, dissipated, or the means, by which he might have raised one, no longer in his power, he is but ill qualified to enter on those employments, in which the Christian ought to be engaged. The *sufferings* of life he may, perhaps, support with resignation; but its *active* duties, from which the greatest advantage both to himself and to others must arise, he will feel himself obliged to renounce. To those more especially, who have been led, by their relation and connection, to look up to him for comfort or protection, he will prove the occasion of painful disap-

disappointment. The consolation, which the safety of him can give, who is dear to us, and who has escaped so great an evil, as the penitent undoubtedly has, they may indeed receive: though no more, in reality, than the alleviation of their grief and distress, it may, for a time, have the effect of positive satisfaction and pleasure. But, for protection or assistance, they will probably look to him in vain. He has broken up the groundwork of their hopes. Instead of strength, he brings them weakness: instead of riches, poverty or debt. They looked for his improvement in science or professional skill, the means of his future reputation and emolument; but he returns to them unskilled and ignorant, destitute of every laudable attainment. In prospect, he was their pride and their glory; but they find him, in reality, the object of compassion and relief. Though disposed, by his returning affection, and his awakened sense of duty, to make suitable

suitable returns for the kindness he owes them, he feels, with unavailing anguish, that the ability to make them is no longer in his hands. Whatever are the advantages of his conversion, he must bear *this* reward of his iniquity: the course of nature cannot be changed, to avert the effects of his misconduct*.

III. It

* "Though youth may be alledged as an excuse for rashness and folly, as being naturally thoughtless, and not clearly foreseeing all the consequences of being untractable and profligate; this does not hinder, but that these consequences follow, and are grievously felt throughout the whole course of mature life. — If, during the opportunity of youth, persons are indocile and self-willed, they invariably suffer, in their future life, for want of those acquirements, which they neglected the natural season of attaining. — Real reformation is, in many cases, of no avail at all, in preventing the miseries, — poverty, sickness, infamy, naturally annexed to folly and extravagance exceeding a particular degree."

See the Chapter on the government of God by rewards and punishments, in Bp. Butler's Analogy.

I cannot pass by the occasion, which a quotation from this invaluable work gives me, of testifying my great respect for it. I have long considered it as one of the best defences of religion, and of the Christian religion in particular, which is any where to be found. Admirably

III. It follows, as a necessary consequence of this, that the penitent is not on equal terms with the innocent, with respect to *peace of mind*. It cannot but be

mirably delineating the pictures of Nature and of Grace, it indubitably evinces, from resembling features, their common origin; thus compelling the candid observer, who admits the divinity of one, to acknowledge also the divinity of the other. The more I examine it, the more am I confirmed in the opinion, that it is the result of the most accurate conception of religious truths, and of the soundest judgement in their exposition and defence. It takes the ground, and admirably maintains it, on which alone the truths of Christianity, and indeed all moral truths, can be defended, the ground of *probability*. When, therefore, it is objected to this work, as I have understood it has been, that it does not *prove* any thing, the objection must proceed from those, who either mistake the drift of the author, or have not a right idea of the force of probable evidence. It proves, concerning religion, all that is necessary to be proved in order to render it, what it was intended, an *obligatory rule of life*. For prejudices, which were formed in early life, and which have been long fostered, it is not easy to know when a sufficient allowance has been made; but I really think it scarcely possible, that a man of common understanding can rise up from a serious perusal of this treatise, and still think, that the evidences for the truth of Christianity are not such, as bind him to an observance of its laws.

See the second Note on Sermon V.

be a source of great uneasiness to him to reflect, that his usefulness to his family and the world, and his claim to respect on that account, is so much less than it might have been. Nor will this be the *only* source of his disquiet. Though it has pleased God, through the mercies of the Gospel, to assure us, that he will receive the returning sinner to his favour; and though, by this means, the most *dreadful* consequence of sin may be avoided; yet, independently of the hazard, that we may go so far as to be unworthy of this grace, *some* of the evils of sin must remain, which it will not be in our power to remove. Though the sincere penitent may be able, with humble hope, to look forward to an *eternity* of happiness; yet, so discordant is sin to our nature, so bitter the conciousness of guilt, that the time will never come, during the *present* life, when we can look back on past transgressions without remorse. The reproaches of the heart, though *softened* by

contrition, can never be entirely subdued; nor can the blush of innocence, once faded, ever be perfectly restored. There is a dignity in conscious integrity, to which the sinner, though penitent, can never more aspire; and, if he has the sentiment proper to his situation, he must be content, like the returning Prodigal, to be regarded, in some respects, rather as a *servant* than a *son*.

But, what an addition must it be to his disquietude, when he contemplates the effects of his misconduct on *others!* It was his duty, as he is now more than ever assured, to be employed in *doing good;* but he discovers, in his mournful retrospect, little more than the remembrancers of *harm.* Without malevolence to men, he has been their enemy. Though his vices may have been such, as seemed chiefly to respect himself; yet it necessarily happens, from the connections and dependencies of society, that no kind of dissi-

dissipation can long be practised, without *ultimate*, if not *immediate* injury to our neighbour; and he finds, by distressful experience, that what he deemed a *personal* and *solitary* vice, is become, in some sense, a crime against his *species*. He has, perhaps, intrenched upon the *peace* or the *property* of others, and in instances, where no adequate recompence can be made. He has, probably by his *conversation* or *advice*, certainly by his *example*, given force to allurements, which otherwise might have been resisted, thus co-operating with those evil beings, who, having themselves forfeited happiness, take a malignant satisfaction in reducing others to a like situation, and meriting the woes denounced against him, who giveth occasion to his brother to transgress; and he knows not how far his pernicious influence may have extended. Of those, whom he is conscious of having *enticed* into, or *further confirmed* in guilt, and whom he would now wish to recal,

some perhaps, already become the victims of their credulity, are beyond the reach of his admonitions; while others, whom he has the *opportunity* of addressing, will probably be addressed in vain; they, who formerly listened with so much eagerness to his *folly*, are now, to his confusion, obstinately deaf to his *wisdom*.

IV. We may add, though the consideration be of inferior importance, that he, who is reclaimed from vice, is less likely to be *uniform in his character*. On some things, it is probable, he will lay *too little*, and on some *too great* a stress. Strictly mindful of particular duties, and severe against particular vices, he will be thought, as if desirous of atoning for his past miscarriages, to act on a morality, which is suited to his *own case only*; nor will his virtues appear to flow from that extended and general principle, which is necessary to give them their full effect, and invest them with the authority of

examples.

examples. It will be long before his inward *sentiments* and his outward *expressions* of them exactly correspond. Though the first should be thoroughly corrected, it will be long before they so influence his actions, as to render them easy and natural, such as seem to speak the language of the heart; and he may, perhaps, be suspected of *hypocrisy*, or other *present* vices, while he is only struggling with the consequences of his *former* guilt.

V. It will be well also, if he does not, from the sense of his sudden amendment, form an estimate of his merit, which may border on, and produce the mischievous effects of *spiritual pride.* Finding himself freed from many faults, to which he was formerly addicted, and in the practice of many duties, which he formerly neglected, he will be conscious, that he is much better than he was; and he may, perhaps, "measuring himself by himself, and comparing himself with himself," be

deceived into the belief, that he is also so much better than *other* men.

But I need not go on to enumerate all the *less* disadvantages of a repentant state, or such as are only of a *probable* nature. Of those, which are of an *important* and *unquestionable* kind, enough have been mentioned to awaken a suspicion, that virtue is not so advantageously to be learned in the school of vice, as some would wish us to suppose; and that, in those celebrated works of fancy, where a reformation from wrong conduct is often so *suddenly* and so *completely* effected, the characters, not exhibiting the real progress of moral principles and habits, nor the combination of qualities as they exist, are not truly copied from life or nature, and cannot, therefore, be safely made the patterns of imitation. Though the *virtuous* and *amiable* parts of such characters may themselves be the just objects of our esteem and admiration;

tion; yet let not our endeavours to arrive at equal excellence be frustrated, as they doubtless would, by seeking it in the *same steps*, and pursuing virtue in a path, where, in fact, she is so seldom to be found. Since indulgence in vice so sullies the conscience, shortens the hour of discipline, and is injurious, if not destructive, to our health and our prospects, let us not be induced to indulge in it under the vain idea of augmenting our glory by overcoming such accumulated difficulties, or of rivalling the hero of a Romance.

Lastly, let us be aware, that, to be distinguished by the irregularities of early life, is not, as we may be induced to imagine, an infallible indication of strong emotions, and a mind formed for high and noble atchievements. Such, perhaps, may be our excuse to ourselves, and such may be the flattering construction of interested or injudicious applauders; but impartial and more discerning

cerning observers may draw a very different conclusion, and perceive, that our deviation from duty is owing, not to the peculiar strength of our *passions*, but to the imbecility of the *reason*, which should control them.

DISCOURSE III.

On the importance of Life considered as a state of discipline.

JOB iii. 20.

WHEREFORE IS LIGHT GIVEN TO HIM THAT IS IN MISERY, AND LIFE UNTO THE BITTER IN SOUL?

TO this question, which, in the days of Job, might well perplex the philosopher, and silence the preacher of patience under affliction, we are now prepared to give a satisfactory reply. Before a future state was fully made known, the advantages of affliction were not so clearly seen. To those, who had no expectation beyond the grave, it must have been desirable, after every hope of earthly comfort had been taken from them, to return to their original

original state of insensibility; for, in the eye of reason, nothing is more evident, than that it is better not to be, than to exist in misery.

It is probable, however, that the plaintive question in the text ought not so much to be referred to any *reasoning* on the subject, as to that impatience under affliction, which human nature, even in its most exalted form, is so apt to betray. For reason, if it be duly attended to, will at all times tell us, that we are in the hands of a God, who knows much better than we do what is best for us, and who, in his goodness, will not subject us to unnecessary and unavailing pain. Accordingly, we find that Job, in his cooler moments, was sufficiently convinced of this. He could bow to the dispensation of the Almighty, and reject with abhorrence the advice, which would have turned away his confidence from him, merely because the scene of prosperity

was

was changed. "What?" says he, "shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" Though he was not able to account fully for the ways of providence, nor to see distinctly the advantages of adversity, he yet had acquired, by his experience of God's goodness, such a trust in it, as shewed him the impiety of murmuring at his situation, or making use of any unlawful methods of extricating himself from it. It was afterwards, when, according to the inequality of temper, with which affliction is generally borne, when he gave way to the suggestions of *passion*, that he preferred death to life in opposition to the decree of an all-wise and benevolent God, and ventured to question the mercy of the dispensation, by which "light is given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul."

Well were it if we, who are so much better informed of the things belonging to

to another life, did not sometimes fall into the same error; estimating the value of the present world by the enjoyments it is capable of affording us, and concluding, that life is no longer worth preserving, than while we can live happy.

If, indeed, the present life were the whole of our existence, this conclusion would be less unreasonable; and the only objection to our acting upon it, in any particular situation of distress, would be our inability of determining whether the evils, under which we suffer, will be *transient* or *permanent*. We see, in the instance of Job, (and, admitting the inspiration of the Book, the instance has the weight of divine authority, whether the character be real or imaginary) that, even extending our view no further than the present life, had he acted on the desire, which his despair of seeing better days suggested, he would have acted wrong. The prosperity and happiness, which

which he afterwards enjoyed, more than compensated for all the evils he had suffered; "the Lord blessing the latter end of Job more than his beginning, and giving him twice as much as he had before." But, if we take an *hereafter* into the account, the mistake of estimating the value of life by its immediate enjoyments will be evident. He, who considers this life as a state of discipline for another, will clearly see why light is given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; he will see, that, in misery and bitterness, the soul is often most effectually formed to the dispositions, on which its future happiness must depend; and that a wish to relinquish life, on account of such sufferings, is as contrary to his own interest, as it is rebellious to the divine dispensation.

Great reason have we, therefore, to consider life as a precious gift of God; partly on account of the happiness, of which,

which, in general, it is the foundation at present; but principally on account of the happiness, of which, unless by our own fault, it will certainly prove the foundation hereafter. And we should be careful, that of these two measures, by which the value of life is to be estimated, we do not forget the *most important*, and that which alone is *invariable*. If we are in the habit of estimating its worth by the fluctuating measure of present bliss, we must frequently form a very erroneous estimate; and we can scarce commit an error more likely to produce discontent, or to render us more negligent of life, and of its highest and best advantage.

It may, perhaps, appear superfluous to enter thus on an exhortation to the *love of life*, a passion, which nature has planted so deeply in every heart: but, though it be true, that, in most of the particular instances, in which the danger of death is apprehended, the natural love of life is sufficient

sufficient to awaken our care, and to put us on our guard; yet it is not found strong enough to preserve men from indulging in many *habits* and *modes* of living, which are confessed to shorten life, and to interfere with its intended purpose.

By frequent meditation on the reason of our being placed here, we should bring ourselves to a firm conviction, that it is by no means a matter of *indifference* whether our days be many or few; and that much less is it indifferent whether the days, which we actually spend here, are well or ill employed. Imperfect as our knowledge of a future state is, we cannot but be assured from the constitution of human nature, that the happiness, which we shall enjoy in it, must greatly depend on qualities previously formed within ourselves; for it is certain, that no complete happiness can exist, where there is not a correspondence between

the outward situation and the inward dispositions. What the dispositions are, by which we may be prepared for the happiness of heaven, Religion, in her care for our salvation, has very fully informed us; and, by the discipline, to which, in whatever circumstances we are placed, she subjects us, she is perpetually reminding us, that they are not to be *suddenly* or *easily* acquired. Man has much to do, before he can enjoy all the happiness, of which he is capable; and this life is the stage, on which it must be done. It is not without reason, that we are so earnestly exhorted to be diligent while the day lasteth; to hasten the great work of preparation for eternity, before the night cometh, in which no further preparation can be made; to add one virtue to another, and to strengthen them all, 'till, by the assistance of God's grace, we attain "unto a perfect man" in Christ.

It should, particularly, be our aim, to establish reason as the sovereign director of our conduct. In proportion as we approach to this, we form in ourselves the character, which, while it is pleasing in the sight of God, and therefore the *condition* of our happiness, is also the essential *qualification* for our happiness; and, though we may never absolutely reach it, yet every one, who has a due concern for his happiness, will endeavour to make as great advances towards it as possible. In the present state of human nature, however, no effectual advances towards it can be made, but by the *practice of virtue*, by long-continued habits of submitting to the government of reason. The *speculative* love of virtue, the inactive approbation of good actions, and the abhorrence of evil ones, is by no means sufficient for the purpose, and would be a very fallacious criterion of our improvement. This, indeed, is a principle, which is implanted in us by

nature. We can scarcely be affected otherwise, if we would. If men differ in this, they differ only in *degree;* for all approve virtue and condemn vice, when the gratification of their own appetites and passions is out of the question. How ineffectual this principle is to the formation of a virtuous character, experience sufficiently evinces. We frequently see those, who, there is little room to doubt, are naturally endued with just and fine feelings of morality; who redden with indignation at the recital of injustice, and sympathize sincerely with the sorrows of the miserable; but who yet, when they appear on the stage of action, regardless of the mischiefs that may ensue, permit their reason to be the sport of every desire excited in their breasts, and their virtue to give way to the slightest assaults of temptation. In addition, therefore, to the principles implanted by nature, man, in order to arrive at the perfection, of which he is capable, has much to do for him-

himself. It was evidently intended, that he should, in some measure, be the creature of his own hand: and it is, accordingly, only by the frequent *performance of good actions*, and the *voluntary abstaining from evil ones*, that he can confirm himself in virtue, and acquire the capacity of his proper happiness *."

This

* "Whoever will consider things, may clearly see, that the present world is *peculiarly fit* to be a state of discipline for this purpose, to such as will set themselves to mend and improve. The various temptations, with which we are surrounded; our experience of the deceits of wickedness; the great viciousness of the world; the infinite disorders occasioned by vice; our being made acquainted with pain and sorrow, either from our own feeling of it, or from the sight of it in others; all have a direct tendency to bring us to a settled moderation and reasonableness of temper; and to correct that violent bent to follow *present inclination*, which may be observed in undisciplined minds. Such experience, as the present state affords us, of the frailty of our nature; of the baneful effects of vice; of the boundless extravagance of ungoverned passion; of the power, which an infinite Being has over us, by the various capacities of happiness and misery which he has given us; has a tendency to give us a practical sense of things, very different from a mere speculative knowledge, that happiness can only consist with virtue, and that vice will lead to misery. It is possible, that the

This being the case, it is reasonable, surely, to consider the life, which is the *season* of this necessary discipline, as a most important period of our existence. Precious are those moments, on which the nature of our situation for eternity is made to depend. If we pass but a *few* years here, overcome but a few temptations to ill, and make but few exertions of active virtue, we cannot reasonably expect to be equal with those, who, in the course of a longer life, have sustained with success a more difficult part, and attained to a more exalted state of cultivation. For, though we are forbidden, both by reason and religion, to attribute any

security of creatures in the *highest* and most *settled* state of perfection may arise, in part, from their having had such a sense of things as this formed and habitually fixed within them, in some state of probation. But it is more than possible, that passing through the present world with that moral attention, which is necessary to the acting a right part in it, may leave everlasting impressions of this sort upon the minds of beings formed as we are."

See the Chap. on a state of moral discipline in Bp. Butler's Analogy. The passage is here a little altered.

any *merit* to our performances, or to imagine, that they can *entitle* us to reward; yet the declarations of Scripture, as well as the nature of the thing, justify us in concluding, that we shall be rewarded *according* to our works.

This is the great consideration, which makes extended life desirable. So far as the present scene of things only is concerned, we may easily suppose circumstances, in which death would be a "consummation devoutly to be wished;" and, even in any circumstances, so uncertain are we of long possessing the good we now enjoy, and so sure are we of incurring many evils, that a melancholy mind might well be excused in estimating the value of life at no very *high* rate. But, when we consider, that, by continuing in life, we retain the opportunity of improving in virtue, and enlarging our capacity of future happiness; that this important purpose may,

perhaps, be answered most effectually by the very sufferings, which we are so apt to deplore; and that every thorn, endured here with the spirit of a Christian, will prove a star in our crown of glory, we shall thankfully accept life with all its ills, and wish it to be extended to the latest period, at which we are capable of moral improvement.

Let it be remembered, however, that we ought not to be led, by this consideration, to repine at the dispensation of Providence, when any one, for whose happiness we are concerned, seems to be prematurely removed from the stage of trial, and to be cut off in the flower of life, while much opportunity for improvement yet remained. In all such cases, we are to recollect, that we are very incompetent judges both of the need there is of discipline in any particular instance, and of the use that would have been made of further means of discipline. We must leave

leave *events* to God. It is, indeed, our duty diligently to pursue all the methods in our power for bringing about the event, which *seems* the best. But, if our endeavours are not successful, we ought, in full confidence of the wisdom and goodness of God, to rest assured, that his dispensation is really the best, however the *reason* of its being so may elude our search.

The proper use, then, to be made of this reflexion is, that we be led by it to take all due care for the preservation of life and its faculties, and to be active and diligent in the great business, for which life was designed to be the stage. The sin of such indulgences in pleasure, as are destructive of health and life, or of such deep engagements in wordly pursuits, as are inconsistent with a proper regard to our spiritual improvement, never perhaps appears more heinous, than when it is considered in this view. He, who

who comes to the close of a life, which has been shortened by vice, or spent for the most part in a way, that will turn to no account hereafter, must feel a very painful remorse. He will then, when it is too late, be sensible of his folly in trifling with those moments, by which his eternal happiness might have been secured; but he must look back to them with double regret and horror, if his conscience oblige him to confess, that the opportunities, which had been given him to improve in virtue, and which were intended as the means of conducting him to happiness, have been employed by him in the service of sin, and as steps to misery.

Let us, that we may avoid such bitter reflexions, and the still more bitter consequences which will follow them, take such care for the preservation of our life and powers, as may enable us long and successfully to discipline ourselves in virtue

virtue and piety. The dangers, to which duty may summon us, we must always be ready to encounter: we never can be sufferers, by obeying the voice of Providence; but, as we value the happiness of heaven, and the satisfaction of an approving conscience, let it not be owing to *vice* or *folly*, that we are cut off in the midst of our days, and that death comes upon us before the business of life is done.

DISCOURSE IV.

On the desire and distribution of Praise.

PROV. xii. 8.

A MAN SHALL BE COMMENDED ACCORDING TO HIS WISDOM.

THE desire of praise and commendation is so powerful an incitement to action, that few things are of more importance to the world, than that it should be gratified according to desert. There is no great reason to doubt, that, in general, this is really the case, and that the observation of Solomon may justly be received as a maxim. For since, in matters of morality, the mind is naturally formed to the approbation of right, and the disapprobation of wrong, men commonly pronounce on the conduct of *others* with

with tolerable exactness, however they may err with respect to their *own*.

There are, however, instances, in which this desire is perverted from its natural purpose, and enlisted into the service of vice and folly; in which, by the injudiciousness of those, who *give*, or the inordinate and ill-directed appetite of those, who *seek for* praise, its candidates are beguiled into actions, which merit only detestation and disgrace. He, for instance, who, independently of *circumstances*, regards conquest in war as commendable and glorious, and incautiously gives it the tribute of his applause, does *his* part to excite men to aim at military reputation, though at the expence of happiness to thousands*; and he,

* "If the idea of glory had not been annexed to success in war, the earth would not so often have been deluged with the blood of its inhabitants. We should not then have heard of Alexander or of Cæsar as the destroyers of their fellow-creatures, but as their protectors and preservers. The genius, which operated so power-

he, who is excited to action by such false estimation, will find, when it is perhaps too late, that the applause, which is not re-echoed by his own heart, is not calculated to afford him any lasting satisfaction.

In order, then, that this sentiment may produce the effect, which was intended, it is necessary, that those, who are candidates for praise, should aim at such praise only, as is worthy of their ambition; and that those, who bestow praise, should be careful to bestow it only on deserving objects, and in due proportions. If, indeed, all men acted rightly in either of these characters, an error in the other would be productive of no material ill consequence. If all sought only for the praise, which is the reward of merit, flattery

powerfully in them to disturb the repose of the world, would, if their love of praise had been properly directed, have rendered them its most active benefactors."

See my Sermon on the King's Proclamation for the encouragement of piety and virtue, &c.

flattery would be rejected with disdain; or, if all dispensed praise in strict proportion to desert, the undeserving would never be able to obtain it. Since, however, general perfection in either character is not to be expected, it may be useful to consider the duty of individuals in each.

It may, perhaps, be a question with some, whether it be allowable at all to act with a view to human praise; but it is a question, into which, whatever might be the decision, it would be of no great use to enter. It is safer to direct principles, which are so prevalent as this, to a profitable application, than altogether to controvert their rectitude. From such opposition, however justly founded, little advantage could be gained. Let us, by whatever means, produce habits of good conduct; and they will not fail of themselves gradually to reflect back melioration on the principles, from which they pro-

proceeded. That it is not forbidden us, however, to have respect to the approbation and applause of mankind, we may easily collect, not only from its being a natural dictate of the mind, but from the favourable notice taken of it in holy Scripture. It is a passion, which is deeply planted in every breast; and though, by long intercourse with the world, and the substitution of better principles, its force is considerably abated, it seldom is entirely subdued; it remains with us through all the stages of life; and, even at our parting with the world, we part with it in the hope, that our name will be mentioned with honour. We should be cautious of checking the motives to useful action, though they may not be the best, till we are able to place better in their stead; lest the mind, feeling no immediate inducement to exert its powers, fall into habitual inactivity; and it is evident, that the love of praise, especially in the earlier period of life, often excites to such

action, when nobler considerations have no effect. It is wrong, indeed, at any period of life, to love the praise of men *more* than the praise of God; but there seems no reason, where they do not plainly come in competition, why we should not allow the first *some* place in our affection. The Scripture, accordingly, frequently refers to it as one of the rewards, to which we are permitted to aspire. The Apostles St. Peter and St. Paul consider it as an important effect of the institution of civil government, which is the appointment of God, that it operates to the "praise of those, who do well;" nor do they, on other occasions, disdain to mix a regard to the opinion of our fellow-creatures with the purest motives of the Gospel; exciting us to the practice of true wisdom by the consideration, that it leadeth to honour and esteem among men. It is true of the love of praise, therefore, as of other passions implanted by nature, that it is the part of

of those, who would attain to the highest excellence of their constitution and frame, not to eradicate it, but to restrain it within due bounds, and direct it to its proper objects.

I. 1. Those, who thirst for praise, should early learn to distinguish between the commendation of the wise and good, and the applause of the depraved or unthinking. This, it must be allowed, is not an easy task; since, in the early part of life, we are apt to judge of actions by the reception they meet with, and are possessed of no certain test, by which the justness of the reception may itself be tried. Natural sagacity however, if permitted fairly to exert itself, would sufficiently discover to us the characters of men; and, unless our eagerness for praise contributed to mislead us, we should not be liable to any great or lasting deception. The misfortune is, that though, when we are censured, we esti-

mate the judgment and temper of those, who censure us, with scrupulous exactness; we are ready to receive praise, from whatever hand it is offered, with an equal degree of avidity. Yet, in both cases, it is evident, there is need of the same discrimination. As unjust censure should give us no pain, nor discourage us in our wise and virtuous pursuits; so undeserved praise should afford us no pleasure, nor encourage us in vice and folly. Since, notwithstanding the general aptitude to determine rightly, the ignorance or the passions of men may pervert their judgments, and bias their decisions, we should beware of implicitly receiving them as the dictates of truth; of considering that as a standard, which is itself so liable to change and error. A very little experience will convince us, that there is no action so bad, but some may be found to praise it; none so good, but some may be found to blame it. It is a too usual policy, among those who go wrong, instead

stead of cultivating a sense of their error, in order to its correction, to lessen its magnitude as much as they can. In this plan of self-deception they may so far proceed, as to obliterate, in that instance at least, their original sentiments of rectitude; and though, at first, in censuring or praising contrary to truth, they are only persuading others to follow their example, and seeking countenance in what themselves disapprove, they may, by degrees, arrive at the more hopeless depravity of falling in love with error, of taking "bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter," and of endeavouring, from conviction, to make the faults, they are addicted to, appear *praise-worthy*. Nor is it less uncommon for those, who are not *positively vicious*, but only *weak in virtue*, to lower in their estimation those heights of virtue, which they despair of reaching; and they are led by this, though themselves may be unconscious of it, to withhold from more vigorous exertions,

and more exalted attainments, the encouragement of that commendation, which is justly their due. It concerns us, therefore, before we are deterred from any action by the dread of censure, or excited to it by the expectation of applause, to consider seriously whether it is a matter, of which those, who are likely to censure or applaud, are competent judges; and whether, if they have sufficient *ability*, they have not yet an *interest*, which may induce them to give an opinion contrary to their better judgment.

It is further to be observed, that we are most affected by the praise or dispraise of those, with whom we most frequently associate: and as, from the similarity of passions and prejudices, our companions and ourselves must view things through nearly the same medium, we may easily, before we are aware, be confirmed in a false estimation of their value; may number, as distinct and additional

ditional suffrages in favour of a measure, what, in fact, are but the repetitions of our own; and consider *that* as having the stamp of general currency, which can be circulated with credit only among ourselves. To prevent this deception, we ought to extend our regard to the more general sentiment, which our conduct is adapted to excite. We should consider how it will be received by persons, who are in situations somewhat different from our own; and especially by those, whose age and opportunities have given them larger views of life, and who, being themselves high in the esteem of men, are most likely to bestow their approbation only on what is really estimable. There is no doubt, that even a moderate share of circumspection in this matter will be sufficient to answer the purpose; and that, if we do but elevate our mind to *aspire* to the praise, which is worthy of our ambition, we shall not find much difficulty in distinguishing it.

2. But it is not enough, that we distinguish in the *kind* of praise we aim at: we must avoid being too ardent in the pursuit of *any*. As little good is to be expected from the man, who is regardless of the impression, which his conduct may make on the mind of others; so much harm is to be apprehended from him, who looks no further than to that impression. There is, indeed, a period of our life, when, as has been said, we are capable of no *safer* or *more exalted* motive*; and when it is excusable, therefore, to be entirely directed by its influence. The ills, however, which, even at that period, so frequently result from it, are sufficient to warn us, that it is not to be trusted to as our *guide through life*. It should be one of the earliest applications of our reason to discover, that virtue has a *surer* criterion, and *higher* rewards, than the praise of men. The approbation of God and of our own conscience should be the *first*

* See Page 6.

first and *great* object of our regard. With this in view, we cannot go far astray, nor incur any fatal disappointment. But it is evident, that, if praise be the sole object of our aim, the probable method of obtaining praise will soon become the only rule of our conduct; and our going wrong or right will depend, not on our own sense of duty, but on the situation, in which we are placed, and the opinions, by which we are surrounded. "Many of the chief rulers among the Jews," we are told, "*believed* on our Saviour; but, because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him." Loving the praise of men more than the praise of God, they were obliged, in pursuance of such a principle, to conform themselves to the opinions of men; and were, accordingly, content, rather than forfeit their seats in the Synagogues, or be lessened in the eyes of their acquaintance, to act in opposition to their own convictions.

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We may add, that, as a too great love of praise is inconsistent with the discrimination, which has now been recommended; so would it deserve to be discouraged, even if all men praised judiciously, and according to the *reason* of things. The desire of praise, at best, is a very *inadequate* motive to right conduct, and would tend, if it took full possession of the mind, to prevent the cultivation of much nobler principles. Praise cannot be extended to the *whole* of our conduct. Were we in the habit of looking no further for our reward, we should be in want of motives to right behaviour in some of the most trying situations of life. There are numberless virtues, as well as vices, which must ever, at least during the present scene of things, escape the cognizance of man. Indeed, prompted and directed *only* by such a principle, our conduct could seldom have the *dignity* of virtue, even in the eyes of others; and, to ourselves, it never

never could be productive of those delightful reflections, which give men a foretaste of heaven.

Thus does the love of praise, when inordinately indulged, sometimes *endanger* our virtue, and, at best, greatly *interrupt its progress.* It is a necessary consequence of this, that, though gratified for a time, it must, eventually, counteract its own purpose. He, who goes no further in well-doing, than the bare desire of praise can carry him, will probably not be *so highly* esteemed as he might have been; but he, who does wrong, to obtain reputation, will be singularly fortunate if, in the end, he be not overwhelmed with *disgrace.* The natural approbation of virtue among men, and the attendant detestation of vice, though suppressed by particular circumstances, will at length most assuredly revive, and assert their injured rights. As soon as it is known or suspected, that,

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in order to obtain praise, we have acted in opposition to our *conscience*, we shall become the objects of contempt; and shall probably be most contemned by those, with whom we were most desirous to be had in honour.

II. 1. Let us now, from the part of those, who *seek* for praise, turn our attention, for a moment, on those, who may *bestow* it. They have a duty of no less importance, though its consequences may not so immediately affect themselves. Whoever has a due concern for the interests of virtue, and the happiness of mankind, will be desirous, that the maxim of Solomon, which I have selected as a text, may hold as generally as possible. In proportion as we are zealous for the prevalence of *true* wisdom, we shall be careful, that the *false* obtain not the sanction of our approbation and encouragement. In order to this, we must remember, even in cases, which, taken inde-

independently, may seem of no great consequence, to exercise our *judgment* before we bestow our commendation. We should consider, that, in giving praise where it is not deserved, we pervert a valuable reward from its original design; and waste a patronage, to which merit has the only claim. When we decide on the actions of men, we may be considered, in some sense, as taking on us the part of that Being, who is their ultimate and only unerring Judge; and to whose decisions, therefore, ours, that they may answer any purpose of good, must always correspond. It concerns us, surely, invested with so high a character, to be faithful in the discharge of its duties; to take all the care we can, that *our* decisions, like *his*, be founded in the nature of things, and be in strict proportion to their respective deserts. Nor let us, through mistaken humility, be persuaded, that *our* opinion and sentence form no part of that tribunal, to which the candidates for reputation desire to stand approved;

proved; and that, therefore, our caution in this respect may be dispensed with. The voice of Fame, though so loud as to reach to distant regions, is composed of sounds scarcely perceptible; nor is it easy to assign the origin or proportion of each. There are few indeed, who do not in some measure contribute to give actions that rank of credit and respect, which they hold in society; and no one can tell *how much* he may contribute. In any case, it is the duty of each individual to act, in this matter, as if he declared the public mind; and to be as scrupulously exact in dealing out his praise, as if the prosperity of virtue depended on his voice.

We are, then, in the first place, to take care, that we do not, by ill-placed commendation, encourage actions or sentiments, which are positively *bad*. Few, it may be hoped, do this with the *consciousness* of doing it; because, voluntarily to assist in forming or confirming a vicious

vicious character, is to be a partaker in its guilt. Many, however, it is evident, afford such encouragement *for want of consideration;* and the evil is much the same, from whatever cause it may proceed.

2. We are also to be cautious, in cases where praise is really due, that we do not *too lavishly* bestow it. Our praise is valuable only as it is dispensed with judgment. Praise given to qualities as *means,* may prevent the *end,* which those means are adapted to produce, and for the sake of which alone they are entitled to praise; and virtue, by the premature attainment of its object, may be checked in its career. To praise even what is laudable, therefore, more than it deserves, is at least to weaken the incentives to higher merit, and to intercept the production of good. But it may, moreover, be productive of much positive harm. We may, by profuse commendation, give a too great strength to passions, which

are innocent or criminal, useful or pernicious, according to the degree, in which they are suffered to prevail. It is highly probable, that much harm of this nature is done by the unthinking and extravagant commendations, which are frequently bestowed on young persons, when their minds first open, and their dispositions begin to display themselves. Tendencies towards sentiments or passions, which are innocent and useful in themselves, and which, perhaps, naturally would only excite in us a proper regard for our endowments and rights, are often fostered, by the encouragement of fond parents, pleased with what they consider as the marks of a *noble and elevated spirit*, till they come to an ungovernable and mischievous excess; till they rise into habits of mind, utterly inconsistent with our own peace and welfare, and essentially interfering with our duty to others.

DISCOURSE V.

On gentleness.

JAMES iii. 17.

THE WISDOM, THAT IS FROM ABOVE, IS GENTLE.

WHOEVER is in search of true wisdom, ought always to keep in view the criterion of it, which is here assigned by the Apostle. Whatever may be our attainments, yet, independently of the *dispositions*, with which they are borne, and the *manners*, by which they are accompanied, they confer not the character, that is most worthy of our ambition. They may, indeed, answer some present worldly purposes; they may enable us to secure advantages, which others, less

skilful, suffer to pass by them; and inspire us with caution to avoid evils, which others incur; but, unless they are supported with meekness of mind, and displayed in gentleness of demeanour, they will certainly fail in the great purpose of making us "wise unto salvation." We ought ever to keep in mind, that the proper business of mankind on earth, is improvement in virtue; and that, therefore, in the exercise of virtue, we must look for every exalted and permanent good. Whatever has not this in view, either in its immediate or ultimate effect, is vain and trifling at least, if not useless or pernicious. It is true, that knowledge, if we have respect to its nature and genuine tendency, is highly *favourable* to virtue. It teaches us to form ourselves to that temper, and to those habits, which are suitable to the rank of beings, in which we are placed; to excite and encourage the same endeavour in others; to diminish the natural evils of life,

life, and to multiply its blessings; it enables us, in short, to be more powerful instruments of Providence in promoting the happiness of the human race. But, considered as existing in any individual, its usefulness will depend on many concurring circumstances; and it well deserves to be considered, whether the knowledge, which is sought after from the mere desire of superiority; or which, when attained, inspires us with a haughty demeanour towards those beneath us; which is founded in vanity, and ministers to pride, be likely to answer these important purposes. To *others* indeed it may, in some degree, prove beneficial; since knowledge, like the sun, can seldom shed its rays, without imparting a blessing; yet to them it will not be *so* beneficial as it might be; and, to ourselves, as it will not enable us to do good on a principle of benevolence, it can be only a gratification of mean and selfish desires, and must be expected to end, as such

gratifications generally do, in "vexation of spirit*."

It might, therefore, be a subject not unworthy of our attention, to consider by what methods we may advance in intellectual excellence, without acquiring, at the same time, the haughtiness of spirit and ungentleness of deportment, with which it is so apt to be attended, and by which its usefulness is so greatly impeded;

* I hope nothing will be found in this Discourse, which can justly be considered as checking a *proper* emulation in youth. Long experience seems to have evinced, that, in a course of education, the stimulus of *immediate rewards* is necessary. In Universities, and particularly that of Cambridge, these rewards are often conferred in the shape of *honorary distinctions;* and so much good has arisen from them, both as inducements to useful and laudable pursuits, and as dissuasives from pernicious ones, that I should not think it right to condemn them, or to discourage the passion for their attainment. As, however, it is pretty evident, that ill consequences, with regard to *disposition and manners*, frequently result from such distinctions, we ought to provide against those consequences by every means in our power; and it was with the view of contributing to this, that the present Discourse was composed.

impeded; in order that, according to the idea suggested by the Apostle, every increase of knowledge may be an increase of *true* and *heavenly* wisdom.

I. It may be sufficient, for the present, to mention only two directions, as likely to be conducive to this purpose. The *first* is, that we endeavour to purify the *motives*, which engage us in the pursuit of knowledge. He, who pursues knowledge solely with an eye to the reputation, with which it is attended; the riches, to which it sometimes is the path; or any other instituted advantage, by which society have found it expedient to excite the industry of men, must be expected to be so *puffed up* by his attainments, as to treat those beneath him with contempt. A regard to such advantages may be a very pardonable motive to set out with; but we must take care, in our advances, gradually to refine it, till it become less hostile to charity, and such as may not

prevent our knowledge from being the means of *edification*. We should early bring ourselves to consider the reason, for which those encouragements were appointed; to reflect, that it was not for the sake of knowledge as existing in ourselves in barren speculation, that society offered such inducements to its attainment; but on the presumption, that knowledge would render our practice more beneficial to the world. If, therefore, we do not, in some measure, answer this purpose, we have no just claim to the rewards, by which it was intended to be secured. But, in order to this, we must endeavour to be guided by the principle, on which those rewards were instituted. *We* also must keep in view, that knowledge is really valuable only in proportion as it makes us better and more useful men; as it improves our own dispositions, and as, by the influence of our advice and example, it enables us to improve the dispositions of others.

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It may, perhaps, be said, that 'this is still to act on motives not *perfectly* pure; that it is still to have regard to a *reward*, though the reward be of a different kind.' True indeed it is, that the difference between men, with respect to the motives, by which they are actuated, chiefly lies in the different opinions which they form of happiness. He, who acts on the *purest* principle, has still some regard to himself; and, though a person of virtuous habits may often, in *single* good actions, be entirely disinterested, yet there is no one, perhaps, who, in proposing to himself a *series* and *course* of such actions, has not "respect to the recompence of a reward." But, as this is not to be expected, so neither is it necessary. A change of the object, from which we look for our reward, is all that is requisite for the present purpose. In general, such a change may be conceived, as will answer every purpose of utility; and may, indeed, be all the refinement, of which

human motives are capable. All that seems indispensable, in any particular case, is, that the reward we aim at should be one, which secures the attainment of the intended *end*. He, for instance, who pursues knowledge *only* for the sake of its instituted advantages, may obtain the object of his pursuit, without reaping from knowledge its *highest* and *best* advantage, and without making it, in any *great* degree, conducive to the advantage of others. But he, who seeks for it on the principle of *doing good*, though, in that, he has respect to the rewards, which await good actions, seeks for it on a principle sufficiently pure for our purpose. *His* knowledge will fully answer the *end*, for which all encouragements to attain knowledge were intended. He will not rest in the enjoyment of its external advantages, with the riches and honours, of which it may be productive; neither will he be satisfied with the pleasures, which arise from the contemplation of speculative

tive truths; but he will go on to reap from it its more important and permanent benefits, by making it the *instrument of virtue*. The light, which shines in his understanding, will manifest itself in his conduct. Nor will it direct his own steps only. He will be solicitous, that it may also direct the steps of others. Far from permitting any obstacles, which might obstruct its rays, to originate in himself, he will consider it as matter of duty to remove every obstacle, which may arise from other quarters, and to *assist* their propagation by every means in his power. Now, a stronger security than this, for his avoiding all haughty and ungentle behaviour, we cannot well desire; for, certainly, there is no effect of such behaviour more easily discernible, than its making men unwilling to take advice and instruction from those, in whom it is observed.

II. The *second* method, by which we may secure to knowledge the gentleness necessary

necessary to its deserving the name of true wisdom, is, the *cultivation of humility*. In general, it is in vain to attempt the thorough reformation of errors in our *outward* conduct, without first amending the inward disposition, from which they spring. For, though actions and sentiments have a mutual influence on each other, the melioration or depravation of the one soon affecting the other; yet no rules of conduct can extend to all the cases, which may occur; and there are some actions, which have no value but as they really proceed from the sentiment, which *seems* to dictate them. In the instance before us, this is, perhaps, peculiarly the case. A soft and conciliating address may, for a time, hide a haughty and contemptuous mind; but, if a discovery should be made, as, sooner or later, it probably will, the mildness of manners, like counterfeited coin, will be regarded as the instrument of deception. On the other hand, an ungentle demeanour is hateful

hateful in exact proportion to the haughtiness of spirit, of which it is supposed to be the effect. When, as sometimes is the case, the outward austerity survives the disposition, which gave rise to it, the offence it excited at first gradually diminishes, and, at length, to those, who fully comprehend our character, altogether vanishes. For our fellow-creatures, as well as our Maker, look, as much as they can, to the *heart*. If they perceive, that this is right, they will not easily be offended; but, if they see reason to suspect, that our austerity is the effect of pride; if they think themselves regarded as objects of scorn or contempt, it is no wonder, that we do not conciliate their affections; that we hinder knowledge from appearing amiable in their sight; and cause that, which should be one of the most *delightful*, as well as *noblest* instruments of good, to become an abhorrence.

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To cultivate humility of mind, we are, indeed, independently of this advantage arising from it, bound by the strongest obligation. We have only to consider, that it ought to be the endeavour of every one, who professes the religion of Christ, to attain the dispositions, which are more peculiarly *Christian*. For, if there be any disposition, which has a claim to that character, it doubtless is *humility*. The representation of human nature, which the Christian scheme has given us, clearly shows, that man has nothing, of which he can justly boast; and that though, with respect to some of his fellow-creatures, more deficient than himself, he be entitled to honourable distinction; yet, with respect to what duty directs him to be, he is much more the object of *pardon* than of *praise*. He, who considers the perfection of character, to which a rational being ought, in strictness, to attain; and how far the best of men fall short of it; who considers how impossible it is, that,

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in the estimation of God, we should have any positive merit to atone for our defects; and how much all need rely for acceptance on a favourable interpretation of their thoughts, their words, and their actions, will acknowledge the justness, with which it has been said, that "pride was not made for man, nor a haughty spirit for him that was born of a woman."

It may, perhaps, be said, that 'he, who is proud among his fellow-creatures, may yet be humble towards God.' But, whatever may be the justness of this distinction, it will contribute but little to the purpose, for which it is alledged. It is impossible but that, in comparison of infinite excellence and might, the loftiest mind must feel its meanness, and the greatest power sink to weakness. But the impression of terror, varying with the object that excites it, is hardly to be counted as a virtue. True humility

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is a permanent principle, and is ever consistent with itself. That a man, who is possessed of this, may be conscious of superiority over others, will readily be granted; but, that he should be led, by that consciousness, to treat those beneath him with contempt, is incompatible with his character. No one will treat his brother with contempt, who does not think himself free from blame in the respect, in which he contemns him; a sentiment, which the man of humility will seldom feel in any matter; and on which, if he felt it, he would scarcely dare to act. For, if he be exempt from *some* faults, which he observes in others, he will consider, that there *are* faults, of which he might justly be accused; and that his freedom from any may be owing to circumstances, from which he can claim no merit; to his being originally endued with better dispositions, or his being placed in situations more favourable to virtue. Such will be his reasoning, in estimating

estimating his *moral* merit; and it cannot be supposed, that it will be materially different, when he compares his *intellectual* attainments with those of others. He will be ready to attribute these also, in a very considerable degree, to causes, over which he had but little control; to the possession of superior abilities, or the enjoyment of better opportunities for improvement; and he will not easily be brought to think, that these, though just reasons of thankfulness to God, who gave them, furnish any good pretence for treating the less favoured creatures of his Benefactor with contempt. "What have I," will he candidly ask himself, "that I did not receive? and, if I did receive it, why should I glory, as if I had not received it?" On the contrary, he will always be disposed to suspect, that he has not improved his faculties and opportunities so much, as in duty he ought to have done.

It generally happens, indeed, that those, who have faculties of the highest kind, and in the highest state of cultivation, bear them with the greatest meekness *. As they best know "how little can be known;" of how much the human mind, after its most successful efforts, must still remain in ignorance; they are least likely to be unduly elated with the advantages, which they possess, in this respect, above others. They are aware, that such advantages may be great only by a comparison, which does them but little honour; and that, in the eyes of a superior being, the excellence of one man above another, on this account, may be much less than pride is ready to suppose. They see, that, notwithstanding particular advantages, there still are many respects, and those of the most important nature, in which men are alike ignorant, helpless, and dependent; a consideration, which,

* "He bore his faculties so meekly."
SHAKESPEAR.

which, though it hinders not those advantages from being truly estimable, is abundantly sufficient to repress the arrogance and pride, which might otherwise arise from possessing them.

It is, therefore, in the first place necessary, that we correct the *pride of heart*, which is frequently inspired by the sense of our superiority over those, with whom we most frequently associate, and with whom we are most apt to compare ourselves. Yet, if we wish our knowledge to produce the best effect possible, particularly on the most numerous witnesses of our conduct, those who know us least, we must not rest here. Though it be matter of the *greatest* consequence, that our *sentiments* be right, this will not be alone sufficient. The connection between actions and sentiments is so natural, that it is often supposed to be, where it really is not. Where there is outward ungentleness and austerity, it will generally be considered as the indication of a haughty

mind; and, though the conclusion should chance to be erroneous, yet all the ill effects arising from the persuasion, that knowledge is productive of haughtiness, will equally follow. It is incumbent on him, therefore, who would not encourage that persuasion, to take care, that his character be uniform; that the sentiments of humility, which he has cultivated in his heart, be visible in the gentleness of his outward behaviour.

It is, indeed, no easy task, totally to change manners, which are become habitual, even when our improved disposition inclines us to wish it; yet it is to be hoped, that, by serious and earnest endeavour, something may be done towards it; and due consideration on the *expediency* of succeeding may, at length, give a force to our exertions, sufficient to overcome every difficulty. At the same time, it will be evident, that the *surest* method to preserve uniform goodness of character in this respect is, to cultivate

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an humble disposition in the *early* period of life *. At that season, the outward expressions are generally a true index of the inward affections. If these, therefore, are then directed properly, both will improve together, will have a mutual influence on each other, and will probably correspond to the end of life.

If we stand in need of any other inducement to the acquisition of this amiable quality, than the consideration of the advantages, which immediately result from it, let us remember, that it is recommended to us by the *example*, as well as by the *precepts* of our blessed Saviour. It was predicted of him, long before his appear-

* This is an advantage of early rectitude of conduct, which is by no means confined to the subject treated of in this Discourse. It is, perhaps, true in general, that inconsistency of character is the result of *depravity corrected;* a less evil, undoubtedly, than *uniform badness* of character; but still, as it is an evil, happy is he, who, by being wise and virtuous betimes, takes the most probable method to avoid it.

See Discourse III.

appearance, that he should not "strive nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets;" that he should not "break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax." This prediction was abundantly verified by his conduct. He assumed no stately deportment, which might keep mankind in awe, and at a distance. On the contrary, in order to conciliate their affection, and to multiply the occasions of doing good, he accommodated himself in every instance, where virtue did not forbid, to the wants and weakness of those, with whom he associated. He seldom took offence at their ignorance or prejudice; but, bearing patiently the insults, which ignorance and prejudice are ever ready to offer, he found means, even from these, to lead them to knowledge and truth; nor did he, in any instance, give *them* just occasion of offence, by such a display of his superior wisdom, as might indicate contempt.

DISCOURSE VI.

On the importance of right opinions in religion *.

1 TIM. i. 13.

I OBTAINED MERCY, BECAUSE I DID IT IGNORANTLY, IN UNBELIEF.

THE character of St. Paul, as exhibited in Scripture, is calculated to teach us many useful lessons; but there is, perhaps, no view, in which it is likely to be of more use, than in the striking evidence, which it affords, of the importance of right opinions in religion. Before the conversion of that Apostle to Christianity, though no one could more sincerely *intend* the glory of God, yet who, more directly than he, could take measures to oppose it? St. Paul had ever been what passes,

* Preached on the *Conversion of St. Paul.*

passes, in common acceptation, for a man of good moral character. Through the whole course of his life, he had proceeded by that rule, which is the generally received criterion of virtuous conduct; he had acted according to his conscience. Yet he had done what, in his more enlightened state, he could not look back upon without the deepest regret. "Touching the righteousness, which is in the law, he had been blameless." He professed himself a disciple of that sect among the Jews, which was distinguished by a strict attention to ordinances; "he was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee;" and no one could convict him of discrediting his profession by his practice. "He had ever lived," as he tells us, "in all good conscience before *God:*" and his life was so fair in the sight of *men*, that he feared not to challenge the perspicacity of his enemies, to discover any thing, which might mark it with disgrace. Nor did he, with Stoical indifference, rest satisfied

fied in negative goodness, or in the exercise of personal virtues only. "Zealous towards God," he was ardently desirous to promote in *others* also, what appeared to him as righteousness and truth. Yet, see the effect of his zeal! He opposes the cause of that God, to whom he intends an acceptable service; and he opposes it by a conduct involving all the *mischief*, though not all the *guilt*, of the most atrocious offences. "As for Saul, he made havock of the Church, entering into every house, and, haling men and women, committed them to prison." "Many of the saints," as he himself testifies, "did he shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and, when they were put to death, he gave his voice against them." Not content with the opportunities of displaying his zeal, which presented themselves to him, he conceived it his duty industriously to search for them. "I persecuted them oft," as he continues his mournful confession, "in

every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and, being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities." In short, this spirit being once excited in him, there was no cruelty, which he was not prepared to perpetrate; nor is it to be questioned, that he, who was consenting to the death of St. Stephen, and guarded the raiment of them that slew him, would with equal readiness, if circumstances had led to it, have assisted in nailing his Saviour to the cross.

The sense, which St. Paul entertained of this conduct, after he became enlightened by the knowledge of Christianity, sufficiently shows us, that he was far from thinking it without guilt. Independently of the uneasiness, which he must have felt, had he been the mere *instrument of evil* to others, he found that, in *thus* being so, he could not acquit himself of *sin*. He frequently refers to it,

it, as a burden still heavy on his mind, confessing, that he had been a "blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious, and, in short, the greatest of sinners." "I," says he, "am the least of the Apostles, that am not worthy to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God." Now, though this acknowledgment, the heightened language of contrition, may, in part, be considered as *figurative* *; though it gives no warrant to *us* so severely to condemn St. Paul, as to pronounce him the "*chief* of sinners;" it yet justifies us in asserting, that, in his conduct towards Christians, he *was* a sinner, and a sinner of no ordinary degree. Let us, therefore, examine more particularly in what his sin consisted.

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* In the Discourse of a gentleman, who was said to be of the *Methodistic* class, I have heard this confession of St. Paul considered as *strict* and *literal*, and unwarrantable (as I thought) conclusions drawn from it. It was partly the design of the present Discourse, to guard against such conclusions.

It has already been observed, that his *intentions* were pure and upright. There is no reason to suspect, that, in persecuting the followers of Jesus, he had any *private* or *secular* ends in view. He was doubtless one of those, concerning whom our Saviour had predicted, that, in so doing, they would think they were rendering God service. To a penitent so sincere as St. Paul, we may give full credit to his declaration, when he tells us, that "he verily thought with himself, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." 'What then,' it may be asked, 'is not our guilt or innocence to be determined by our intentions? Is the criterion of virtue changed by the Christian dispensation? Nay, has it not been said, even by an Apostle, "Therefore to him, who knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin?" And does not this imply, that to him, who knoweth not, sin is not imputable? Does not St. Paul himself also,

also, when enlightened by the knowledge of the Gospel, and assisted by the Spirit of God, lay it down as a rule of conduct, "that every man be fully persuaded in his own mind;" affirming him to be happy, "who condemneth not himself in the thing, which he alloweth?" To this it may be answered, that, though no one can be justified in doing any thing, whether in itself right or wrong, *without* a persuasion, at the time, of its being right; yet, how far such a persuasion is *sufficient* to justify him, must depend on the manner, in which the persuasion was formed in his mind. Unavoidable ignorance of our duty is an excuse for every failure in it; but, in the exact proportion, in which our ignorance is wilful, will be the guilt of the transgression arising from it. To live by the light we have, is our indispensable duty. He, who does otherwise, is already condemned by his own heart. But this, though our duty, is not our *whole* duty. We have also to take

take care, that we obtain all the light we can. If we are deficient in this, and do what we afterwards discover to be wrong, the offence, different indeed according to the cause of our neglect, is yet always of a *culpable* nature; and, though we may plead our ignorance in mitigation of *punishment*, it never can absolve us from *guilt*.

This appears to have been the case of St. Paul. Satisfied, possibly through pride or self-sufficiency, with the knowledge, which he already possessed, he had firmly shut his mind against the admission of more. The circumstance of his having "profited in the Jewish religion above many his equals in his own nation," seems to have produced in him, what the consciousness of superiority over others immediately around us is too apt to produce, the vain imagination, that he had reached perfection. In contemplating his own proficiency, he overlooked the defects

fects of the system, in which he had been educated; and did not consider, what he afterwards himself taught, that the Jewish law was but our *schoolmaster* to bring us unto Christ. In common with the greater part of his countrymen, he had suffered his mind to be so filled with prejudices, that there was no room for the operation of reason, and evidence had lost its natural force. Had he been duly open to conviction, there would have been no need of a "heavenly vision" to effect his conversion. It is probable, that, previously to that event, he had been furnished with *sufficient* testimony, that Jesus was the promised Messiah. As he lived in Jerusalem, he could be no stranger to the fame of the miracles done by our Saviour and his Apostles; and it was the duty of an impartial inquirer after truth, to give them an attentive consideration. He knew, that it was affirmed by the disciples of Jesus, that their Master was risen from the dead. "He knew, that, when

when all the Apostles had been shut up in the common prison, and the high priests, the council, and all the senate of the Children of Israel, had sent their officers to bring them before them, the officers came and found them not in the prison, but returned and made this report, 'The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors; but, when we had opened, we found no man within:' And, that the council was immediately told, that the men they had put in prison were standing in the temple, and teaching the people: And that, being brought from thence before the council, they had spoken these memorable words, 'We ought to obey God rather than men:' The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew, and hanged on a tree: Him hath God exalted with his right hand, to be a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins: And we are his witnesses of these things, and

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so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God has given to them that obey him*." All this, had it been duly considered, would undoubtedly have convinced him, that the matter was of God. In any case, it is certain, that he had not obtained such an assurance of the disciples of our Lord being imposters, as justified his *opposing* them; much less his opposing them, as he did, by "breathing out threatnings and slaughter against them."

In this, then, consisted the sin of St. Paul. He had voluntarily brought himself into a situation, in which he acted wrong by *principle*. For, though he was "*persuaded*, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus;" yet his persuasion was not the result of employing the *best* means of information in his power; but of resting in the knowledge, which he had already acquired, to the

* See Lord Lyttelton's Observations on the Conversion, &c. of St. Paul.

the exclusion of endeavours after further improvement. At the moment of action, he was indeed bound to act as he then thought right; but he was blamable in having espoused such principles, as led him to conceive he ought to do that, which, in fact, was "to fight against God."

The reception, which such conduct will meet with at the hands of God, we may learn from the words of the Text: "I obtained *mercy*, because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief." The most favourable view, in which it can be considered, is, that it be made the ground of mercy, and mitigate the severity of punishment. Allowances will be made, according to the cause, from which our ignorance may proceed; but no circumstances can be conceived, in which wrong conduct, arising from ignorance not altogether unavoidable, will be *approved* by God, or be admitted as the ground of *reward*.

I. Permit

I. Permit me, from this instance, to observe to you, in the *first* place, of what importance it is to obtain such principles of action, as may lead us to act rightly. It does not appear, that, in the conversion of St. Paul, any immediate change was produced in his *intentions*. Though a conviction of the truth of Christianity, and a knowledge of its nature and design, could not fail soon to meliorate his heart, probably all that was at first effected, was that conviction itself. Yet, his *intentions* continuing the same, how different was his *conduct!* What a contrast between Paul the *Jew*, the finished disciple of Gamaliel, and Paul the *Christian!* He, who had formerly breathed nothing but vengeance against those, who differed from him, now, the preacher of universal benevolence, earnestly exhorts his adherents to do good unto *all* men! The same zeal for the glory of God, which had before led him to *destroy* the faith, now excited him to undergo every hardship and dan-

ger in its *defence*. He, who had set such undue estimation on ordinancies as, for the sake of them, to suppress every sentiment of humanity, could now see, that "mercy is better than sacrifice;" could now say, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God." He, who had once "persecuted the Church unto death," could now make this confession, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not *charity*, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no *charity*, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not *charity*, it profiteth me nothing." Undoubtedly, the *greatest* offenders are those, who, knowing what is right, still pursue the

the wrong. They, at the moment of action, are condemned by their *own heart;* and therefore, without sincere repentance, they can have no hope of escaping the judgment of *God,* who is "greater than their heart, and knoweth all things." But, while we are careful to avoid such *presumptuous* offences, let us also remember, that we may yet, through ignorance or inadvertence, do things, which include a *considerable degree* of guilt, and which, when our eyes are opened to their real nature, will cost us many hours of remorse. The mind, on which the pure beams of the Gospel have once shined, cannot with tranquillity look back on any evil, of which it has been the occasion; and if, by wilfully remaining in ignorance, we leave ourselves the fit instruments of evil, we may accumulate the causes of disquiet, 'till our peace is irrecoverably destroyed.

It is also to be observed, that we, who

have been *educated* in a Christian country, can scarcely, without our own fault, be so ignorant of our duty as the unconverted Paul. In this respect, the lowest Christian has the advantage of the best instructed in any other religion. Neither the *cathedra* of Moses *, nor the schools of Philosophers, could furnish a lesson of morality, so well adapted to inform the understanding, and to influence the heart, as the single Sermon of our Saviour on the mount. We must not, therefore, be too ready to apply to ourselves the apology of St. Paul. If *we* do ill ignorantly, and in unbelief, let us take care, that it be not "because we love darkness rather than light." We are bound to make improvement proportionable to the means of knowledge, which are put into our hands; for we are expected to act, not only according to the light we have, but also according to the light we *might* have.

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* Matt. xxiii. 2.

It may, perhaps, be alledged, that St. Paul's deliverance from ignorance and unbelief was the effect of a *miraculous* interference, for which we have no ground of hope; and that, therefore, the example, though it shows us the *advantage* of right religious opinions and principles, affords no encouragement to our endeavours to obtain them. To this it may be answered, that, in this respect also, the example is not without its use. It at least points out to us the *fountain*, from which such encouragement is to be derived. There is, indeed, a difference, but the difference is rather in *degree*, than in *kind*. *We* also, if not wanting to ourselves, may obtain assistance from above: "God will not deny his Holy Spirit to them, who ask it." St. Paul, for the purposes of his ministry, was instructed in a way, by which we must not expect to be instructed. He obtained his *particular* mercy, "that in him first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them, who should

hereafter believe in him." But this, as it will not be granted us, so neither is it necessary. We are justified, however, by parity of reason, in concluding, that, if we perform *our* part, we shall receive all the assistance from above, which is necessary for our purpose. We shall be enabled, by Divine grace, to attain to that degree of knowledge, which the station and duties assigned us may require.

II. *Secondly*, the case of St. Paul may lead us to set a just value on the Christian dispensation. As it shows us the importance of right principles in general, so it displays the peculiar excellence of those inspired by the Gospel, and affords us the *noblest instance* of our religion's being a "doctrine according to godliness." Independently of *Christian* principles, few men would venture to place themselves on a level with St. Paul. To the advantages of cultivated reason, he had superadded the assistance of the Jewish revelation; and in this he had been

been "taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers." Indeed, with respect to *information* in religion, he was all that one could be, who was not a Christian. Yet it was not, we have seen, 'till the "day spring from on high visited him," till he was guided by the knowledge and belief of *Christianity*, that he ceased to be *prepared* at least for a conduct, which was adverse to the honour of God, and the good of men.

III. *Lastly*, we may learn from it a lesson of liberality and candour. It is an evidence, which cannot be controverted, that, in considering wrong conduct as the *certain* indication of bad intentions, we may easily pass unjust judgment. Had a bigot to a religion much better than the *Jewish* been the judge of St. Paul, the treatment, which St. Paul had met with, would probably have been no better than what himself had bestowed upon Christians. Of this, the persecutions, which Christians have so often raised against

each other, afford melancholy grounds of belief. Yet the severest reproof, which he experienced from *him*, who knoweth the heart, was, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" and the reason alledged for his refraining to do so was, that his opposition would be injurious to himself, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Though, therefore, the *outward conduct* be such, as we are obliged altogether to condemn, there may always be something in the *motives*, which is the reasonable ground of mercy. This mercy we, in imitation of our divine Master, should ever be ready to show. Instead of irritating our adversaries by reproach, and the charge of insincerity, we should endeavour, by correcting their mistaken notions, to direct their sincerity and zeal to a better purpose; nor should we be too ready to attribute that to *malignity*, which can fairly be imputed only to *error*.

DISCOURSE VII.

On the importance of right notions of God.*

JEREM. ix. 24.

LET HIM THAT GLORIETH, GLORY IN THIS, THAT HE UNDERSTANDETH AND KNOWETH ME.

SINCE he is most religious, who acts most in conformity with the will of God, it necessarily follows, that to have right *notions* of God, is a matter of the highest importance; for on our notions of God must depend, in a great measure, our *knowledge* of his will. If we are accustomed to think of God as a being like ourselves, we shall not even *aim* at the conduct, which alone can be pleasing in his sight. Unless we consider him as a being of a *spiritual* nature, we shall not be

* Preached on Trinity Sunday.

be careful to worship him in spirit and in truth. Unless we are impressed with a due sense of his *hatred to sin*, and of his power to *discover* and to *punish* it, we shall not live under the perpetual fear of incurring his displeasure by committing sin. If we believe not, that God is *holy* and *pure*, we shall not endeavour to be holy and pure ourselves. If we believe not, that he is *long-suffering*, *full of compassion*, slow to anger, and that he desires the greatest possible happiness of the whole creation, we, it is to be feared, shall not be led, by our own inclinations alone, and by the mere dictates of nature, to imitate him in those perfections.

The truth of this has been sufficiently evinced by experience. We know, that the Heathens, not only in their general conduct, but in the celebration of their solemn religious rites, were guilty of the greatest impurities and cruelties; that,

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in their endeavours to recommend themselves to one or other of their Deities, by imitating the several qualities attributed to them, they transgressed every rule of morality. How men came to entertain such conceptions of God, can be accounted for only on the supposition of that depravity in our nature, which is, in many other instances, so clearly seen; for reason, if it had been rightly applied, would undoubtedly, from the works of creation alone, have drawn more just conclusions concerning the Creator, than the generality of the Heathens really did. God has never left himself without witness. When he "did men good, gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, and filled their hearts with food and gladness," they should have concluded, that he *delighted* in goodness: they should have turned from the vanity of worshipping idols, the imaginary patrons of cruelty and vice, and have served the living God, the maker of heaven and earth.

earth. But, when once, from their natural tendency to evil, they had given way to the gratification of their appetites and passions; and had lost, by the consequent neglect of religious services, that knowledge of the Deity, which was either originally revealed, or deducible by principles of right reason, they were, of course, led to form their notions of him from their own corrupted ideas of perfection, and to think, that he delighted in what best pleased themselves.

Great was the mercy of God to mankind, that he did not leave them in this state of darkness. To the people of the *Jews* he again revealed himself as the Being, to whom alone worship is due, the maker and preserver of all things; as the "holy Lord God, who is to be worshipped in holiness;" as the "Lord God merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in mercy and truth;" and to whom, accordingly, no sacrifice can be accept-

acceptable, but such as is offered with dispositions of charity towards men. The immediate object of the Mosaic dispensation was, to restore, and to keep up, the knowledge of the true God in the world; and, in proportion as this knowledge prevailed, purity of manners and righteousness of dealing prevailed also. While the Jews continued to conceive of God, as they had been taught by Moses to conceive of him, they were careful to serve him by the practice of virtue; and, in consequence, enjoyed that national prosperity, which will generally result from the prevalence of virtue. But, as soon as their notions of the Supreme Being were debased; as soon as they fell off to the idolatry of the neighbouring nations, their manners likewise became corrupt: intemperance and debauchery overspread the land: oppression and injustice every where prevailed: and their state, weakened by intestine divisions, the sure consequence of vice, fell an easy

easy prey to the first, who ventured to attack it *.

To *Christians* God has been pleased to make a still further revelation of himself. The dispensation of the Gospel has shown him to us in characters, which before were either entirely unknown, or seen under great obscurity. The discovery, we may be assured, was intended to answer an important and gracious purpose; and we should be inexcusable, if we did not do our part to promote its accomplishment. It cannot be a matter of indifference, whether we think rightly of the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sanctifier of the world. How can we properly perform our duty to God, as he stands related to us in those exalted characters, unless we have just notions of the characters themselves? Has God made such a manifestation of himself to us, merely as a matter of curious

* See, particularly, the various representations of the Prophets previously to the Babylonish captivity.

curious speculation, which we may innocently either attend to, or not? Surely, this cannot be the case. Since, in his intercourse with us, he consults *our* advantage only, and since he does nothing in vain, every such manifestation must doubtless have in view, the amendment and exaltation of our minds, or the direction and assistance of our conduct.

It has indeed been said, that "his faith cannot be wrong, whose life is right*." But this is an assertion, which, without being altogether false in itself, is likely, by the mode in which it is stated, to lead men into dangerous error. If it only mean, that a good life is the truest *criterion* of a right faith, it is what none need deny; being perfectly consonant to the declaration of Scripture, that "the goodness of a tree is best known by

* "For modes of faith let graceless zealots fight;
His can't be wrong, whose life is in the right."
POPE's Essay on Man.

by its fruit." But, if it mean to say, as it seems to do, that it is a matter of *no consequence* what our principles of belief are, and that we need only pay attention to our outward conduct, it is both an erroneous and dangerous assertion. Professing a regard for the *end*, it encourages us to neglect the means of obtaining it. Faith and practice, it is true, have a mutual influence on each other. If either be right, the other probably will not be materially wrong; and if, by any means, one become essentially wrong, the other will not long continue right. It is still, however, important to inquire, which of them it is in our power most easily to rectify. If I mistake not, in attempting first to establish a right *belief*, with respect at least to the being and attributes of God, and the relation in which he stands to us, we observe the method pointed out by the reason of the thing, and that, which has been observed by God himself. For, let us ask, is it likely,

likely, that his life will be good, whose faith is not right? Can he come to God, who does not first believe, that "*he is*, and that he is a rewarder of them, that diligently seek him?" Can he discharge the duty of gratitude, which he owes to the sacred Persons of the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as his Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, who does not know and acknowledge them in those characters? Can he stand in due awe of God, and in perpetual fear of offending him, who is ignorant or unmindful of his *hatred* against sin, his universal presence to *discover* it, and his almighty power to *punish* it? Can he love God "with all his heart, and with all his understanding, and with all his soul, and with all his strength," who thinks not of his *mercy* and unbounded *goodness?* Can he perform, in any tolerable measure, his duty to his neighbour and himself, amidst the temptations to transgress it, which the world is ever presenting to him, who

is without those incitements to perform it, which religion alone supplies. Accordingly, we may observe, in the several dispensations of revelation, that the first care has always been to inspire a right belief, from which, as from a pure fountain, right practice might proceed. In the Patriarchal, Jewish, and Christian schemes, faith is the principle, which is first endeavoured to be established. Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham first believed, and then gave those trying instances of obedience, by which, in the language of the Apostle, "they obtained a good report." The whole economy of the *Jews* was built on that faith, by which Moses, "seeing him, who is invisible," undertook the great task of bringing them out of Egypt; by which they "passed through the red sea," and obtained those conquests over their enemies, which the strength of their own arm was ill adapted to attempt; and, what I have already noticed, according as that faith was kept alive,

alive, or suffered to decay, they were obedient or disobedient to the moral precepts of their law. With respect to the *Christian* scheme, it is at least equally evident, that a right faith is the foundation of our security for observing its laws, as well as the condition of our obtaining its promises. Our Saviour, having himself inculcated the necessity of faith as a principle of obedience, directed his followers to do the same; and an injunction to *believe*, was the general opening of Apostolic teaching. Even the immediate disciples of our Lord do not seem to have been duly influenced by his precepts, 'till those events took place, which were adapted to confirm their faith. The Scripture, besides, expressly declares, that "without faith, it is impossible to please God;" and it will not be easy to show, that the conduct, which is not pleasing to him, is right.

The plain conclusion from this reason-

ing is, that it is our duty to improve our idea of God, as much as our faculties and means of information will permit. Here, however, as I think, a distinction ought to be made between the *nature* or *essence* of God, and those *attributes* of God, which are implied in his works of creation, of providence, and of redemption. If, as has just now been said, we are to obtain a knowledge of God with a view to *serving him acceptably*, our inquiry is principally to be employed in finding out the relations, in which he stands to *us*. In truth, it is only with respect to these relations, that we can know any thing of God. It is only with respect to these, that the Scriptures have set him forth to us, or that our faculties are capable of comprehending him. It would be presumptuous in man, who, in the most improved state of his knowledge, knows not how the parts of the most minute body are united and kept together; it would be unpardonably presumptuous in him,

him, to think of finding out the nature of the incomprehensible God. "Can we, by searching, find out God? can we find out the Almighty unto perfection?" The Scriptures inform us what the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost have done for us; and we may thence gather the relation, in which they stand to us, and the duty, which we consequently owe to them: but they say not much concerning the relation, which subsists between the divine Persons themselves; and what they do say concerning it, is more for the sake of setting forth our obligations to them clearly, than of acquainting us with the *nature* of God. Accordingly, the terms, which are employed for this purpose, are *popular* ones, drawn from relations among ourselves, and are not adapted to convey any precise ideas. We mistake, therefore, in supposing, that these terms can explain to us the exact relation subsisting between the sacred Persons of the Godhead. This is a mat-

ter, which must necessarily, at least during our present state of existence, remain an unsearchable mystery. What I mean, therefore, to recommend, is, that we improve our knowledge of the divine Being, as he stands related to us; that we frequently contemplate what the Father has done, and is every moment doing, as our *Creator* and *Preserver;* what the Son has done, and is still doing, as our *Redeemer* and *Mediator;* what the Holy Ghost has done, and is ever doing, as the *Enlightener* of our understandings, and the *Sanctifier* of our wills *.

I. In

* The reader may see these notions explained and illustrated more at large in different parts of Dr. Hey's Norrisian Lectures. Indeed, though I have no distinct recollection how my mind was brought into the train of thinking, which immediately gave rise to these remarks, and though I claim no right to make Dr. Hey accountable for each particular one; yet I have no doubt, that the substance of what is here said was furnished, or at least suggested to me, by an attendance at his Lectures.

I with pleasure embrace this opportunity of acknowledging further, that I reckon my attendance at Dr. Hey's

I. In order to this, it is necessary, in the *first* place, that we come to this study with a proper disposition of mind. It is necessary, in particular, that we enter upon it with *humility*, and with a sincere intention of *following the will of God* more and more exactly, as we arrive at a more perfect knowledge of it. With respect to humility, nothing is more evident than that, when the "high and lofty Being, that inhabiteth eternity," is our theme, we, "who are but of yesterday, and know nothing," cannot be too diffident of our abilities to find him out. It is

Hey's Lectures among the most effectual means of giving me the view of Christianity, which I find most satisfactory; and I think it matter of congratulation to the Christian world, that they are published. If, as is the opinion of some not given to be vainly apprehensive on the subject, there be any peculiar danger, from the circumstances of the times, of the spread of Infidelity among us, I do not know of a more effectual check to it, than may be derived from that view of our Religion, and that mode of defending the doctrines and discipline of our national Church, which the principles, so fully opened and so firmly established in those Lectures, point out.

is only to persons of this description, that God will vouchsafe to declare himself. "To this man will I look, saith the Lord; even to him that is *poor*, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." It is also equally evident, that the object of our improvement in the knowledge of God, should be, the *direction of our conduct*. We cannot reasonably expect, that God will bless our inquiries on the subject, if we enter upon them with any other view than this. If we do enter upon them with this view, we have the promise of God's assistance to ensure our success. "He, that hath my commandments, and *keepeth* them," says our Saviour, "he it is, that loveth me; and he, that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will *manifest myself* to him*."

II. Another method, which I would recommend for improving our knowledge of

* See this part of the subject treated more at large in Discourse IX.

of God, is, frequent contemplation on his *works*. "In the visible frame of the world, wherever we turn our eyes, we meet with evident marks of the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of God*." But we should not idly rest in the *general conviction*, that God is possessed with these attributes. We ought to examine the works of creation with serious attention, and with the particular view of discovering in them the properties of their Maker. The more accurately we examine them, the higher will our idea of God be exalted. We shall find, that we return from every such examination with new incitement to adore and to praise him. "We shall, more particularly, be led to admire, with humble thankfulness, the wisdom, which has made and disposed all things so fitly for the use and service of men; the wisdom, which has framed our bodies, and which has endued us with knowledge and understanding†."

III. Let

* Tillotson. † Tillotson.

III. Let us extend our meditations also to the *providence* of God. Let us consider him as the *preserver*, as well as the *maker* of the world. It will not fail to exalt our idea of the divine Being, to reflect, that it is he, who upholdeth all things by the word of his power; that he extendeth his care to every part of the universe; and that it is "in him we live, and move, and have our being." It is not conceivable, that, without the perpetual support of the Almighty, any part of nature could, for a moment, perform its office, or remain in its present situation. The more, therefore, we consider the vast and innumerable movements, which are ever going on, the more must we be astonished at the unspeakable wisdom and power of him, who conducts them. But, if God takes care of the *material* parts of the creation, it is still less to be imagined, that he neglects the *spiritual*. If he preserves our *bodies*, it is not likely, that he should disregard our

minds.

minds. Accordingly, it has ever been the sense of considerate men, that the providence of God extends to every event; that men may employ the *means*, and may have some liberty in the employment of them, but that the *end* is directed by God; that "the horse may be prepared against the day of battle, but that safety is of the Lord."

This will lead us, by a natural deduction, to a sense of the *continual presence* of God, and of his knowledge of every thought, that passes in our mind; a consideration, which cannot but have a favourable effect on our conduct; since, if duly attended to, it will not suffer us to dwell on any *thought*, much less to do any *action*, but what we suppose will be *approved* by God.

This kind of contemplation will also raise our ideas of God's *goodness.* For there is no one, I may venture to assert, who

who can look back on the events, which have happened to him in life, without finding reason to admit the good providence of God in his own favour; without recollecting many instances of deliverance from danger, and many instances of unexpected prosperity, in which his own prudence and power but little availed him; and he cannot recollect them, without acknowledging, at the same time, the *goodness* of that Being, to whom he is so much indebted.

IV. Another thing, which I would recommend, is, the contemplation of God in his *word*. It is in the Scriptures, that we have the fullest manifestation of the divine Perfections; especially of those Perfections, which ought more particularly to be the occasion of our thanks and praise, and the objects of our humble imitation. No one can there mistake the *moral character* of the Deity. None, who read the Scriptures as declaring the

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"mind of the Lord," can doubt his love of order and justice, his enmity against sin, his purity and holiness, his truth and faithfulness, his desire to impart happiness to all his creatures. In the great work of our *Redemption* especially, as set forth in the Scriptures, we have the fullest display possible of justice, wisdom, and goodness; and we never can contemplate it with a due degree of earnestness, without finding our ideas of those attributes, as they reside in the Godhead, more and more exalted.

Lastly, let us ensure success to these methods of improving our idea of God, by *entreating his blessing* upon them. Let it make part of our daily prayers, that God would be pleased to instruct us more perfectly in the knowledge of himself, and of his will. Where so little can be done by our own abilities, let us not neglect to beg assistance from him, who alone *can*, and who is ever *ready* to afford it.

it. We have only to prepare our minds to ask it, with the sincere desire of being made wiser unto *godliness*, and may then rest in the assurance, that our petition will not be denied.

As a conclusion from what has been said, I will beg leave to add, that, though we cannot be too earnest in improving our *own* ideas of God, and in making them as conformable to truth as we can; yet we must not extend our zeal to correct the belief of *others* by any methods, which are inconsistent with charity. In such a high and mysterious matter, it is not wonderful, that men should differ. They must necessarily differ, according to their different capacities, opportunities of information, and measures of diligence. Even those, who express their ideas of the supreme Being by the *same words*, do not think of him *exactly* in the same way. It is, indeed, highly probable, that the thoughts of sincere men con-

concerning God, according to the methods, by which we can ordinarily come to the knowledge of him, and in the respects, in which a just knowledge is important, do not differ *so much*, as the difference in their expressions may sometimes give occasion to suppose; and that, if their thoughts could be known to each other, no difference really subsists, which need cause a division in their society, or a separation in their worship *.

Be

* The importance of *uniformity in worship* does not seem to be sufficiently considered even by many of those, who, in general, are not inattentive to religious concerns. How far, in order to accomplish this purpose, *unity of doctrine*, especially in matters, which are allowed to be beyond human comprehension, should be given up, is a question of great importance. As it respects those, whose province it is to form or preserve terms of communion, it is a question of great *difficulty* also; but not so, I think, as it respects those, who are required to join in communion. Respecting the first, I will now only observe, that it seems right, not to *narrow* the terms of communion more than is absolutely necessary. This, as far as circumstances permitted, was the policy of the wisest among our early reformers; and, if I mistake not, it is a policy built on apostolic authority. As to the duty of those, who

Be this, however, as it may, so long as an *apparent* difference continues, we should

who are called upon to join in communion with any established church, it is, I think, reducible to this single consideration, namely, whether the terms of communion require any thing *sinful*. If they do not, the obligation, which evidently lies upon all Christians to preserve the unity of the church, remains in full force.

Were the Roman Catholic religion the established one of the state, I could not conform to it; because, as I think, it requires *sinful* terms of communion; and it is certainly right to obey God rather than man. Were Presbyterianism the religion of the state, though I should not consider it as the form of church government most consonant to that instituted by Christ and his apostles, I should yet not think myself justified in separating from it on that account, and, for the sake of what I might deem more *expedient*, breaking through a plain and positive obligation. How conscientious and intelligent Dissenters, who do not pretend, that the church of England requires *sinful* terms of communion, reconcile it to themselves to break the unity of the church, by a separation from it, is a problem, which I have not been able to solve.

To students in Divinity I wish to add, that, at a time like the present, when, as it is said, uncommon exertions are making among the Dissenters, by the erection of new meeting-houses, and otherwise, to draw off the members of the established church from communion

should consider it as an occasion for the exercise of our forbearance and charity. With respect to *himself*, every one must believe as the evidence appears to him. He is, however, bound to obtain the best evidence he can; to take care, that his belief be grounded on the most diligent inquiry,

munion with it, it is right, that the friends of the church should be aware of the greatness of the evil intended, and provided with the proper means of counteracting it. For this purpose, it is advisable, in the first place, by recurring to such works as *Bishop Jewel's Apology for the church of England*, in which the true grounds of a *lawful* separation are contained, *Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity*, and those parts of the venerable *Jeremy Taylor's Ductor Dubitantium*, which relate to the subject, that they should endeavour to obtain a just sense of the *importance* of uniformity in worship, and of the consequent obligation upon them to maintain it. Hocker's work is large, and I have sometimes thought, that a judicious abridgment of it would be a useful book. Of more recent authors, I would recommend, besides *Dr. Hey's* Lectures, already mentioned, *Dr. Rogers's Persuasive to conformity;* the very excellent *Discourses* of *Dr. Powell* and *Dr. Balguy;* an *Essay on the Church*, printed at Glocester, in 1787; and, lastly, *Daubeny's Guide to the Church*, very lately published. It will, of course, be understood, that, by my general recommendation of these works, I do not profess my approbation of every particular contained in them.

inquiry, which his ability and opportunities will permit him to make; and that it be not formed with a view either to favour the indulgence of his passions, or to confirm a system of preconceived opinions. With respect to *others*, his business is not so much to regulate their faith, as to supply them with the evidence, by which they may regulate it themselves. This is an office of charity. But no pretence of zeal for the propagation of religious truth, no alledged intention of "doing God service," will justify him in proceeding further than this. If the arguments, which he has offered in the spirit of peace, fail of the effect, that he wishes to be produced, he must not attempt to give them effect by any species of violence. "The wrath of man can never work the righteousness of God." He must not even be less disposed to shew kindness to those, who differ from him, merely because they do differ; much less may he, for that reason, do them any positive

positive harm. It is in vain to alledge, in defence of such misguided zeal, a concern for the souls of men, and a desire, that, in a matter so important as faith, they should not remain in error; for, what we cannot do for others, without infringing the laws of *charity*, the very laws we are pretending to fulfil, it is plainly not our province to attempt.

DISCOURSE VIII.

On the omnipresence and omniscience of God.

ECCLESIASTICUS xvi. 17.

SAY NOT THOU, I WILL HIDE MYSELF FROM THE LORD; SHALL ANY REMEMBER ME FROM ABOVE? I SHALL NOT BE REMEMBERED AMONG SO MANY PEOPLE; FOR WHAT IS MY SOUL AMONG SUCH AN INFINITE NUMBER OF CREATURES?

THE conception, against which we are here guarded, is very apt to arise in the mind of such a short-sighted being as man. Presuming to judge of God from ourselves, we are ready to imagine, when we contemplate the vast extent of the creation, and the numberless beings, with which it must be furnished, that it is not

possible for him to extend his regard to them all. When we consider the myriads of sensible creatures, which abound in the different and distant quarters of the globe, to the East and to the West, from the Northern to the Southern pole, upon and within the earth, in the air, and deep beneath the surface of the sea, we are confounded at the *multiplicity* of objects, which seem to demand the Almighty's care. When we extend our thoughts to other worlds, we are apt to fear, that their *superior importance* may intercept the attention, of which we find ourselves in need. "When we consider the heavens, the work of his fingers, the moon and the stars, which he has ordained;" we are ready to exclaim, with David, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?"

From this impression, different men, according to their character in other respects,

spects, are liable to be led into different modes of wrong conduct, some inconsistent with their present peace and comfort, and some destructive of their happiness for ever. The humble and well-disposed indulge the apprehension, that, among the many more exalted and more virtuous characters, which exist, they may be over-looked, and their feeble endeavours to recommend themselves to the divine favour be finally without effect. It has even been urged, as an argument against the credibility of the Christian dispensation, that it supposes more attention from the Deity to this globe, than is consistent with the fact of its being so inconsiderable a part of the universe; that, amidst innumerable worlds, some of far greater magnitude, and probably of far more importance, than ours, it is not reasonable to think such distinguished favour should be shown to ours, as is implied by the coming of the Son of God among us, for the purpose of our re-

demption. On the other hand, those, who are previously ill-disposed, sometimes take occasion, from the same consideration, to encourage themselves in their wickedness. Bad men, no less ready to give way to their *hopes* on this subject, than good men to their fears, have ever endeavoured to cultivate in themselves the persuasion, that they shall escape the eye of the Almighty; saying in their heart, "God hath forgotten; he hideth away his face, he will never see it."

I. The opinion, however, that any thing can escape the observation of God; or that the meanest of his creatures is unworthy of his attention and care, is inconsistent with any notion of the Deity, which can be collected either from reason or from Scripture. Every mode of reasoning, by which we are conducted to the evidence of God's *existence*, proves him to be present in *every place*, and at *every time*; and it is certain, that he cannot any

any where be present, without a *knowledge* of all that passes. God is an *intelligent* Being, who exists by the necessity of his nature. He must, therefore, necessarily comprehend all things in himself, and be at all times equally present, in the *exercise* of his intelligence, to every point of the universe*. When, however, we consider the vast number of accountable beings, which fall within the compass even of our limited knowledge, we are astonished at the idea of a mind, which can take cognizance of them all; and our astonishment, without due correction, may easily generate some degree of unbelief. The thoughts and actions of a single human being constitute a prodigious mass of various and discordant evidence, from which, were they all distinctly known, a judgment of the character on the whole could not be formed, without a very tedious and difficult process.

To

* See Dr. Samuel Clarke's *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God:* Prop. 8.

To know, therefore, the characters of *all* the accountable beings in the universe, and to deal with them accordingly, implies a power far beyond our conceptions. Yet, to deny it our belief on that account, when it is affirmed of the supreme Being, is nothing less than to deny his *existence*, because we cannot comprehend his *nature*. We should recollect, that this comparative narrowness of conception is the necessary consequence of our being *creatures*. It is not possible, that one created being can take in the ideas of *all* created beings of the *same* class; much less is it possible, that he can also take in the ideas of each individual being of all *other* classes. The truth is, we are too apt to reason, without making due allowance, from our own faculties, to the power of God; as if, "by searching, we could find out God; could find out the Almighty unto perfection." But, though the idea of God, to which we can here attain, is chiefly to be derived from his works, and particularly from

from the *mind of man*, made in the "image of God;" yet we ought ever to be cautious of so considering God to be like ourselves, as to imagine, that he is under any of our *inabilities* or *imperfections*. In our excellencies, we may be like God; but God is not therefore, in all things, like unto us. The mind of man, endued with faculties suited to a particular purpose, the accomplishment of his happiness, is limited, in its operations, to the contemplation of such ideas only, as might have influence on his happiness; and it would be the highest presumption to argue from *it* to the unlimited mind of the great Creator. Thus, however, we do argue, whenever we doubt of God's knowledge of our thoughts and actions, and of his consequent dealing with us, from the difficulty, which we find in conceiving it; when we suffer the proof of its *possibility*, from the fact of creation, and of its *reality*, from the necessity of a continual preserver, to give way to the wild suggestions of those,

those, who would have God to be a being like themselves. "To whom will ye liken me, or to whom shall I be equal? saith the holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number.—Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel; My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding." When we minutely examine, and attentively consider any single work of creation, we cannot but admire the wise provisions, with which it abounds, for accomplishing its intended purpose. In the human body, parts, which are scarce perceptible to the sight, are often so important in their use, as to be essential to health and life. The patient investigation of ages has left some, of which the uses

uses are unknown or doubtful; and probably many more, of which the existence is not yet discovered *. So that the work of creation, with which we are most nearly concerned, and which we should seem to have the readiest opportunities of examining, is so intricate in its contrivance, so wonderful in its energies and resources, as to baffle the ingenuity of man to explain it. Every production of the earth affords a source of speculation, which the study of a life is not sufficient to exhaust; and, if we could understand the nature of things more immediately within our reach, we should find, by extending our regard to other worlds, that "these are but *parts* of the ways of God; that the *thunder* of his power would not yet

* The system of the *absorbent vessels*, the lacteals and lymphatics, on which the whole economy of sustenance depends, was not *fully* discovered 'till within the course of the present century, nor *at all* till the beginning of the last; and, though much attention was paid to Anatomy before the time of *Harvey*, even the *circulation of the blood* was not known, till discovered by him about the year 1616.

yet be understood." For, "knowest thou the ordinancies of heaven? Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season, or canst thou guide Arcturus and his sons?" The idea of innumerable worlds, of immense magnitude, moving with scarce conceivable velocity, yet with undeviating regularity, so as completely to answer the several purposes, for which they were designed, impresses the mind with astonishment and awe. Even to trace the *laws of motion*, which are observed by them, is so arduous a task, as to exceed the ordinary efforts of the human understanding. Accordingly, the discovery of them has justly been thought to spread distinguished glory round the name of the individual, who made it*.

Yet,

* Notwithstanding what was previously done in particular parts of the subject, by *Copernicus*, *Galileo*, *Kepler*, and others, the discovery of the *theory of the heavenly motions* may, in a sense more than *popular*, very

Yet, how distant, how immeasurably distant is this from a discovery of the *immediate means*, by which the motions themselves are effected! To attempt the investigation or conception of these would be presumptuous. To beings like us Gravity, Electricity, and Magnetism, must ever remain the names of powers, of which, though the effects may, by extended experience, be more fully and accurately ascertained, the *nature* and *first cause* will still be altogether unsearchable. Strictly speaking, indeed, they are only so many *methods*, in which the various operations of nature are conducted; *effects* rather than *causes;* and can with propriety be called causes, only in comparison of effects, which are still more distant, in our conceptions, than *they* are, from

very fairly be ascribed to *Newton*, the *most illustrious, the ever-memorable Newton*. Yet, how many able and indefatigable Astronomers lived before the time of Newton! So great, and of such difficult investigation are the "works of the Lord," even when "sought out by those, who have pleasure therein!"

from the original mover of all things. So justly, even in *this* sense, may we exclaim, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" But, inconceivable as is the power, by which the heavens and the earth were created and are sustained, we must allow that power to be in God, or suppose, what is altogether impossible, that such wonderful effects exist without a cause. It is not possible, that, without the aid of an ever-acting agent, any part of nature could, for a moment, perform its office, or remain in its present situation *. Nothing less, in short, than the perpetual presence and

* "All those things, which we commonly say are the effects of the *natural powers of matter* and *laws of motion;* of gravitation, *attraction,* or the like; are indeed (to speak strictly and properly) the effects of *God's* acting upon matter continually and every moment, either immediately by himself, or mediately by some created and intelligent beings."

Dr. Samuel Clarke's *Evidence of Natural and Revealed Religion;* Prop. 14.

and operation of the Almighty, in every part of the creation, will satisfactorily account for what we see and know. We must, then, from the undeniable facts of the creation and continued preservation of the *material* world, at least admit, that a power exists in God, of which no exertions of human art or strength can afford us the most distant resemblance; and the concession, if duly pursued, will oblige us to confess, that there is no reason to disbelieve, from the mere difficulty of our conceiving it, that the *moral* world is also subject to his perpetual inspection, and that he notices the thoughts and actions of every intelligent being.

II. Further; as God is *able* to extend his regard to all his creatures, so also, we may reasonably conclude, he is *willing* to do so. Nothing is beneath the notice of the Almighty. That, which it was not beneath his wisdom to create, it cannot be beneath his goodness to ob-

serve and protect. In estimating the comparative value of things, we proceed by a narrow and selfish criterion; judging them to be worthy of regard, only as they are adapted to promote our own advantage. God proceeds by a very different rule. It is not for his own sake, that he has created the various orders of beings, or that he demands their obedience. For, "can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that we are righteous? or is it gain to him, that we make our ways perfect?" It is evident, from the constitution of the world, which abounds with provisions for good, that the production of happiness in the highest degree possible, is the Almighty's plan. He created every living thing, not only that it might contribute to the happiness of more exalted beings, but also that it might be happy in itself. We need not, therefore, seek further for the importance

of

of any thing, in the sight of God, than its *susceptibility* of happiness. Every such being seems to be endued with an innate persuasion, that his own happiness is of *unspeakable importance**; and, doubtless, this persuasion, the dictate of nature, corresponds to the estimation of that happiness in the divine mind. It is not indeed to be imagined, that God, in judging of his *rational* creatures, considers them of *equal* excellence, or that he will show them the same marks of his favour; yet it is his aim, "as God of all," while he exactly appreciates the merits of each, to confer happiness upon all, according to their several capacities of receiving it. The humble and well-disposed, who have few opportunities afforded them of manifesting their virtue in splendid deeds, have no reason to doubt of their being in the remembrance of God, from the consideration, that, in comparison of others, their

* "Ipse enim se quisque diligit, quòd *per se* sibi quisque carus est." CICERO, de Amicitiâ.

their fellow-creatures, *their* services are of small importance, and themselves unworthy of regard. All the *actions* of men are equally insignificant with God. Their value, in his sight, can arise only from the *intention*, with which they are performed. As methods of moral discipline to the agents, they cannot but be pleasing to him, whose delight is in the increase of happiness, in proportion as they are adapted to improve their dispositions, and to enlarge their capacities of happiness. But, as instruments in his hands, for the accomplishment of his purposes, they are all of equal efficacy. He can make the most trifling incident an occasion of producing the greatest event. In this sense, "all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; for he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth." There is abundant opportunity, in the most retired walks of private life, for the exercise of every virtue, which can secure

to

to us God's regard and favour. Nay, the disposition, which is most apt to indulge this gloomy apprehension, has, perhaps, the *least* ground of fear. "For, as it is impossible, that God should overlook any of his creatures, so we are authorized to conclude, that he regards, with an eye of peculiar benignity, those, who endeavour to recommend themselves to his notice, and who, in unfeigned humility of heart, think themselves unworthy that he should be mindful of them *." "Thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

In answer to the objection, which has been urged, from the sentiment I am considering,

* See the *Spectator*, No. 565, an elegant Paper on the subject of this Discourse.

considering, against the credibility of the Christian dispensation, it may be sufficient to observe, that, as it proceeds entirely from *ignorance*, it ought to have no weight in opposition to *positive evidence*. It is no good reason for the disbelief of any thing, that we are not able to answer all objections to its truth. In the present case, I may add, it seems easy to oppose one conjecture by others of at least equal probability. The inhabitants of other globes may not have fallen from the original rectitude, in which they were created; or, if fallen, they may have fallen in a way, which required a mode of recovery very different from that, which is implied in the scheme of our redemption; or, lastly, if redemption, and by the same benignant method, has been necessary to ten thousand worlds, there is nothing impossible or unreasonable in supposing, that it has been extended to them all.

Let

Let not, then, the cavils of infidelity and ignorance, the suggestions of our fancy, nor the love of sin, induce us for a moment to suspend our firm belief, that "the eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good." Though we cannot *conceive* the omnipresence and omniscience of the Deity, there is, we have seen, all the assurance necessary, that they are both *possible* and *real*. "The sinner shall not escape with his spoils; and the patience of the godly shall not be frustrated *." As the privacy of the wicked will not screen them from the just punishment of the Almighty; so, we may rest assured, to the meanest of those, who sincerely seek him, he will be found a most bountiful rewarder.

* Ecclesiasticus xvi. 13.

DISCOURSE IX*.

On the disposition *requisite to an inquiry into the truth of Christianity.*

JOHN vii. 17.

IF ANY MAN WILL DO HIS WILL, HE SHALL KNOW OF THE DOCTRINE, WHETHER IT BE OF GOD, OR WHETHER I SPEAK OF MYSELF.

THOUGH it is the declared design of christianity, as it is indeed the evident one

* The Dedication, which is prefixed to the Volume, will naturally seem to extend to *all* the Discourses contained in it. The Author, however, wishes it to be understood with an exception of *this* Discourse, which he published some time since in a separate form, and dedicated to the Right Rev. Richard Watson, D.D. Lord Bishop of Landaff, Author of the "Apology for the Bible," as a testimony of his respect for high talents exerted in the defence of Revelation. As that impression is nearly dispersed, and as the Discourse itself seemed appropriate to the design of the present publication, it has been thought advisable to reprint it here. It may be proper to add, that a few alterations have been made in it.

one of all God's dispensations respecting us, to improve our minds, and carry them on towards the perfection, of which they are capable; yet christianity does not undertake to accomplish its design, without the previous use, on our part, of such means for its accomplishment, as our previous situation afforded. It furnishes the seed, but seems to suppose, that, according to the best of our ability, we have already tilled the ground *. There is a certain disposition of mind, which, as *rational* beings, independently of supernatural assistance, we are able, and therefore under indispensable obligation, to acquire. If this were not the case, the reception or rejection of the christian belief could never be matter of praise or blame: there would, in this instance, be no room for the exercise of that freedom of

* See the parable of the Sower, and the *application* of it, so often repeated by our Saviour, "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear;" he that, by having an "honest and good heart," ready to obey, is *prepared* to understand, let him attend: it is in vain for any other to do so.

of choice, which, in all the dealings of a righteous governor, is the necessary foundation of reward and punishment.

It is, perhaps, the neglect of cultivating this disposition, rather than the want of direct attention to the evidence of our religion, which is the cause of the melancholy fact, that, at a period so enlightened as the present, when the truth of christianity has been all but *demonstrated*, there are still so many, who reject it. For, though the greater number of unbelievers may justly be ranked with the unthinking; we have, it must be owned, experience of some, who have fair claims to mental excellence, and who, as scholars, are sufficiently acquainted with the sacred repositories of our faith; but who yet know not, that "the doctrine they contain is of God."

In order that we may avoid this worse than heathen ignorance, and obtain the promise

promise of that fruit of our inquiries, which our Saviour holds forth to us in the text, it concerns us carefully to attend to the conditions, on which the promise is made. "If any man is *desirous* to do the will of God, he shall know," it is said, "whether the doctrine of Christ be from God."

I. In the *first* place, whoever seeks after the will of God, from the sincere desire of obeying it, will be diffident of his own ability to discover it. To persons of a disposition different from this, revelation does not promise, nor does it seem adapted, to afford information or assistance. "To this man will I look," saith the Lord, "even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." The dispensation of the gospel in particular addresses itself exclusively to the humble in heart*. How unreasonable it is in man to suppose, that, by the unassisted use of his own powers,

* Matth. xviii. 3.

powers, he can comprehend the nature of the great Creator, and understand the whole system of his providence, when, in his examination into the minutest work of creation, he meets with innumerable difficulties, which he is unable to surmount, it is not necessary now to display. The consideration of the arguments, by which, from the insufficiency of reason to direct us, the necessity of a revelation may be shewn, would lead me into far too wide a field. It is enough for my purpose to observe, that this is not the disposition, to which God has promised that he will vouchsafe to reveal the knowledge either of himself or of his counsels. It is the oft-repeated language of scripture, that "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble." "Whosoever," saith our Saviour "shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein." And, though this declaration is not to be understood as if, in matters of religion, reason

reason is no more to be made use of, than young children can make use of it in *any* matter whatever; yet it undoubtedly means, that, so far as we are circumstanced as they are, our behaviour ought to be the same. As children have little or no use of the faculty of reason, it is necessary, in order to their safety, that they should, in *all* things, be directed by others. In those, who have attained to a mature state of the understanding, this conduct would be wrong; because reason, where reason is competent to decide, is their proper and appointed guide, and they are under an obligation to be directed by its decisions. But, when the nature of the Supreme Being, and his method of dealing with his rational creatures, either in the state of their original uprightness, or in the case of their having forfeited his favour by disobedience, are the subjects of inquiry, as *men* are exactly in the same situation with *children*, they ought to observe the same conduct, and receive

receive the instructions of Christ respecting them with the implicit confidence of children.

II. *Secondly*, in the desire to do the will of God is implied, that we are led to the search after religious knowledge, not by a regard to any collateral advantages, with which it may be attended, but by the sincere love of it, as the guide of our life. Christianity no more undertakes to assist the religious inquiries of those, who, from a blamable disposition, engage in them for a wrong *end*, than of those, who, from a cause of the same nature, pursue them by a wrong *method*. It no more answers for our success, when, in our search after the divine will, we have in view the exercise of our talents, or the display of our attainments, than when we imagine, that our reason alone is sufficient to direct us. Whoever enters on inquiries of this kind with the same views, with which he engages in other branches

branches of knowledge, has no claim, from the promise in the text, to any further reward than that, which intellectual labours in general may reasonably be expected to confer. Speculations on the divine will, like other speculations of an abstruse nature, by exercising the powers of the understanding, will not fail to strengthen and enlarge it; but they will not necessarily lead to a true knowledge of the subject; nor, indeed, on *such* a subject, a subject so far beyond the human comprehension, have we any probable means of arriving at the truth, but by guidance and assistance from above. And if, as we are assured, it be the design of God, in vouchsafing to us the knowledge of his will, that we should improve ourselves by the habit of obeying it, this assistance is to be expected by those only, who enquire after it, not that they may be distinguished above others by the superiority of their attainments, but with the intention of obeying it more and more

more perfectly, as they attain to a more perfect knowledge of it. Those who, with the Greeks of old, in their investigations into religious truth, seek only after *wisdom*, will probably, like them, arrive at an erroneous conclusion, and esteem "Christ crucified" to be *foolishness*. As, at the first propagation of the gospel, "not many wise men after the flesh," were believers in it; so neither in the present, nor in any future age of it, is it to be expected, that wise and learned men, *as such*, will be more ready than others to admit its truth. There is a certain simplicity and honesty of mind, which, as it is essential, in this case, to success, so will it make up for the want of almost every other qualification; and, while pretended philosophers, actuated by the spirit of the "elders, and chief priests, and scribes" among the Jews, reject the preaching of the heavenly Jesus, the "common people" who are "Israelites indeed," will always "hear him gladly."

It concerns those, therefore, who are accustomed to take up their opinions on the authority of others, to be aware, that, on the subject of religion, this procedure is peculiarly dangerous. The sanction of a respectable name may easily lead them into fatal error. It is, indeed, matter of just *regret*, that men of high intellectual endowments, should be deniers of the truth of our religion; but it is certainly far from affording any just *argument* against its truth. On the contrary, while the wisdom of the world is of so different a spirit from that of the gospel, it is what the nature of our religion may lead us to expect. Till, therefore, it can be shewn, that all the wise and learned engage in religious enquiries, with the disposition, which may justly entitle them to success; or, till it can be shewn, that there is a direct tendency in wisdom and knowledge to purify the intentions; and that the improvement of the heart must necessarily keep pace with that of the head, it will

will be no good reason, even to those, who judge from the authority of others, for rejecting our religion, that many, who are esteemed wise and learned, disbelieve it.

III. *Thirdly*, if we are directed in our inquiries into the will of God, by the desire of doing it, we shall not only be led to search after the knowledge of it with this particular view, but also earnestly endeavour to *live by the light we have*. "He that keepeth the law of the Lord, getteth the understanding thereof *." Though I would not charge the whole body of unbelievers with "loving darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil;" nor deny, to a *Herbert* or a *Hume*, the praise of sincerity and probity; yet I cannot help thinking, that a very considerable share of unbelief may justly be referred to the love of sin. That the gospel is at enmity with sin, though one of

* Ecclesiasticus xxi. 11.

of the strongest presumptions of its truth, has ever, by a sad perverseness of operation, been the most formidable obstacle to its reception. It is indeed scarcely to be expected, that those, who are accustomed to neglect duties, of which they acknowledge the obligation, or indulge in gratifications, which they consider as unlawful, will very candidly examine the credibility of that religion, which, even according to *their* estimation, heightens the obligation to every virtue, and increases the enormity of every vice. "Every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved." But let it not be determined of christianity, when rejected on this ground, that it is deficient in evidence. What I mean, however, more particularly to observe is, that, since light is actually come into the world, sinners *cannot* thus escape the condemnation arising from the important fact; that even those, who do not admit the *doctrines* of the gospel, are yet

yet under an obligation to observe all the duties of it, which are strictly *moral*. For, though there are some moral precepts, which are peculiar to the gospel, and many, which are carried to a higher degree of refinement, than they probably would have been by unassisted reason; yet, from the nature of moral duties, they become, when proposed to us, deducible from the principles of reason, and therefore obligatory on them, though they could not, perhaps, by reason have been originally traced out: in like manner as we cannot but admit the truth of a mathematical demonstration, when proposed and explained to us, which yet, without the help of a better invention than our own, we should never have been able to discover. The love of our enemies, as inculcated in the gospel, though it formed no part of heathen morality, may now, from its conducing to the general happiness, and that of the individual possessing it, be easily shewn to be a duty of the

law of nature *. That suppression of criminal *sentiments*, even at their first arising in the mind; that voluntary mortification and abstinence, with respect even to lawful gratifications, with other like duties enjoined in the gospel, though so little insisted on by the best teachers of morality antecedent to our Saviour, as justly to be deemed *his* commandments only, are yet evidently necessary to prevent the commission of evil *actions*, and to the attainment of those habits of self-government, which exalt the mind, and in which indeed the essence of a virtuous character consists †. Every one, therefore, to whom the preaching of the gospel has been extended, whether he admits or rejects its *doctrines*, is equally obliged to observe its moral precepts ‡. The conviction

* See Matth. v. 43. to the end.

† See, particularly, Matth. v. 22. to 31. and Matth. vi. 19. to the end.

‡ In saying this, I do not mean to deny, that there are *some* duties incumbent on a believer, which, as they arise out of certain relations, can become duties only when

viction of this obligation produced an attempt, in a conscientious unbeliever*, to separate the authority of Christ's doctrines from that of his example and precepts. The success of the attempt was such as might have been expected, and will not, I trust, be repeated. I am, indeed, far from imagining, that it is *possible* for the generality of men, unassisted by the belief of christian doctrines, to come at all near to an observance of christian morality; and I principally take notice of the obligation, to evince the inconsistence of infidel principles amid the light of christianity, and to show, that, with every *ingenuous* mind, it ought to be a strong proof of the need he has of the assistance to be derived from christian belief, and a strong inducement joyfully to

when the relations themselves are acknowledged. Such is that referred to in *John* v. 23. Bishop Butler calls *these* moral duties. Whether, in strict propriety, they are rightly called so, is not worth inquiring here: it is sufficient to say, that I mean to include only those duties, which arise from *acknowledged* relations.

* Rousseau.

to accept it. However necessary the knowledge of our duty be to the observance of it; yet, such is the propensity of mankind to depart from it, the bare knowledge of it is not likely to have any other effect, than to increase the consciousness of sin. If, therefore, christianity only told us our duty more fully and plainly than we could discover it by reason, it would do little more, I fear, than awaken us to a livelier sense of misery. On a comparison of our duty, so made known to us, with our imperfect performance of it, we should each of us have sufficient reason to exclaim with Saint Paul, "Oh wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" and, if we were actuated by the same sincere desire of being delivered from it, we should also, with him, gratefully accept of the *means* of deliverance, which are offered to us "in Jesus Christ*." It is

* See the whole of the 7th Chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans.

is only in the *doctrines* of christianity, particularly the great one of our being judged hereafter, and rewarded or punished according to our conduct here, that those motives are contained, by which we can be effectually restrained from evil, or excited to good. It is easy to conceive, that the preparation of the mind for the enjoyment of heaven, may require the painful performance of many duties, from which no earthly advantage can possibly arise, and to which, therefore, nothing but the expectation of *heavenly* rewards could excite us; and it is certain, that, when a sinner, on the brink of giving way to a temptation, can say, with firm assurance of its truth, "I shall be called into judgment for this hereafter," he has an inducement to restraint, with which no moralist on earth could furnish him.

As it is not so much my design to convince the infidel of his error, as to prevent those, who are wavering in their faith,

faith, from being influenced by the authority and example of infidels, I pretend not to enumerate *all* the reasons, why the evidence of our religion has not its proper effect; nor to point out the several degrees of the *sinfulness* of infidelity, according to the circumstances under which it is persisted in. I cannot, however, with respect to the last head, help remarking, that its sinfulness must be *very different* in those, who are led to it by a view of christianity, as it is exhibited amidst the corruptions and absurdities of Popery, and in those, who, from the "love of darkness rather than light," or even from considerations less blamable than this, reject it, when presented to them, as it is in this country, by Protestants of every name, if not in its original purity and excellence, yet certainly with no corruptions, that can shock common sense, or contradict the plain deductions of reason. What has been said will, I think, be sufficient to shew, that it would not be

difficult

difficult to account for by far the greatest part of the infidelity, which prevails, without supposing christianity to be deficient in any reasonable evidence of its truth. If no one can be justified in his disbelief of a religion, which professes to be of God, and which supports the profession by even probable proofs, unless he finds no hindrance in his search for religious truth, by an ill-grounded conceit of his own ability to discover it; unless he has so prepared his mind for the admission of it, as to seek for it in order to his moral improvement; and unless, finally, as the only sure *test* of his sincerity, either to himself or others, he is a conscientious observer of all the moral duties, of which he already knows the obligation, it will easily be seen, that the number of those, who can be justified in their rejection of christianity, or whose authority in rejecting it ought to have any weight, is very inconsiderable.

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From the opposers of christianity, indeed, whatever be their number or description, there is no ground to be apprehensive of its *total* overthrow. Christ has said, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." On this promise, as a rock sure and stedfast, we may rest our firm belief, that it will successfully repel the assaults of every enemy; nay, taking into consideration all the nations of the world, we need not doubt, that it will daily be more and more widely diffused, till, at length, as "the glory of the Lord," the "earth shall be filled with the knowledge of it, as the waters cover the sea." There is, however, too much reason, it must be acknowledged, in the mean time, to be apprehensive, that *many individuals*, to the loss of their present peace, and the hazard of their eternal safety, by the "cunning craftiness of those, who lie in wait to deceive them," may be induced to "disobey the truth," and to "deny the Lord who bought them:" and this acknow-

acknowledgment, while it furnishes the best apology for addresses like the present, ought also to awaken, in the minds of all the professors of christianity, a deep sense of their obligation, not only to be able to give a "reason of the hope that is in them," but, what is of still greater efficacy in the "conviction of gainsayers," to manifest the *sincerity* of their hope, by the correspondent holiness of their lives; so that men, "seeing their good works," may be forced to acknowledge the excellence of the principles, they proceed from, and "glorify their Father, which is in heaven."

DISCOURSE X.

On the Resurrection of Christ, as a proof of the truth of Christianity *.

1 CORINTHIANS XV. 20.

Now is Christ risen from the dead.

SINCE, in a religion, which comes from God, there must be sufficient evidence of its truth to convince every reasonable mind, it seems natural to expect, that every such religion, when proposed on the ground of testimony, should be supported by a *variety* of credible proofs. In the case of a religion, which, like that of the Jews, is supported by the immediate and constant interposition of heaven, a conviction of its truth will be enforced in the same manner, and nearly in the same degree, on all. Evidence, which is

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is addressed to the *senses*, will not be very different in its effects. But proofs like those, on which the belief of a revelation made at a former and distant period of time must be founded, are not calculated, separately, to make the same impression on different minds; nor is any one of them in particular, therefore, likely to procure the belief of it a *universal* reception. What, with one person, is sufficient to produce a firm conviction, may perhaps, to another, appear only as a probable presumption. While one judges of the truth of the religion proposed by the completion of prophecies, which it involves, or the history of the miracles, to which it lays claim; another determines on its divine origin by the tendency of its doctrines, the lives of its professed believers, or the credit it meets with in the world; and though all, by honest and diligent inquiry, may arrive at the same confidence of belief, if the religion itself be true, yet it is to be expected, from

from the nature of things, that they will arrive there by different ways.

Of this variety of evidence Christianity is by no means unprovided. At its first introduction into the world, it challenged men's assent by the completion of numerous prophecies, by the working of miracles of many different kinds *, by the preaching of the purest morality, by the exemplary conduct of its professors, particularly their voluntary sufferings on its account, and by its speedy propagation through most of the civilized quarters of the globe. And as, at first, the wisdom of God thought fit to give a variety of attes-

* These, it may be said, were evidences addressed to the *senses*, and therefore of the same kind with those, by which the authority of the *Jewish* religion was supported. This is true, so far as the miracles of Christ and his Apostles were *seen;* but it is to be recollected, that they were seen but by a small part even of the then existing race of mankind, and that the question here is concerning a *general* reception. Sensible evidences of the *Theocracy* were open at least, for a considerable time, to *all* the people of the *Jews*.

attestations to the truth of our religion, adapted to the various circumstances and dispositions of men; so still, by the relation of them preserved in the Scriptures, in conjunction with the knowledge attainable by observation and experience, there is, we presume, sufficient evidence to convince persons of every description, of every turn of mind, and every mode of education, who will enter on the inquiry with an honest intention. But, though this evidence be *sufficient*, it would, I think, be presumptuous in any one to consider it as *redundant*. It would ill become a preacher of Christianity to disparage any part of this evidence, or to neglect, as occasions offer, to make use of *every* means of evincing the truth of his religion, with which it has pleased the providence of God to entrust him. He should not be too ready to rest its general reception on *any particular* proof, how convincing soever it may appear to himself; but should consider, that, as a faithful

faithful steward of the houshold of God, he is to produce, out of the treasures committed to him, such things as best suit the necessities of his several dependents*.

With respect, however, to individuals in their private capacities, who set themselves to inquire seriously into the truth of Christianity, they may, perhaps, find an advantage in confining their attention, for a time, to some *particular part* of the evidence, on which it is founded, to some circumstance or event of importance, which is contained in the history of it, and which, if once established, will, by its connexion, establish all the rest. Any one, for instance, who is convinced, that the

* I have heard of a book, entitled, "The *one* great argument for the truth of Christianity," which, according to the notions here stated, is rather a suspicious title. Whether any thing I have said be applicable to the book itself, I do not know, not having had an opportunity of seeing it. Be this as it may, I have received assurances, which I firmly believe, that the author is a truly respectable member of the Christian church.

the account, which is given in Scripture of St. Paul's conversion, is true, can no longer doubt that Christianity is of God. The particular event, however, on which I would at present enlarge, as an instance of this kind, is that of our Saviour's Resurrection. There is none more likely, by the strength of evidence, which attests it, to obtain conviction; and there is none, by which, when believed, the truth of the whole Christian scheme is more directly concluded.

As it would not come within the compass of a discourse to enter so minutely into the particulars of the evidence, by which the wonderful event of our Saviour's resurrection is testified, as might be necessary to give it the full effect, of which it is capable, I shall employ this opportunity in making such remarks, as it may be useful to have in view, whenever that evidence is the more immediate subject of your thoughts; thus rather preparing

preparing you to decide on the evidence, than deciding for you; and they may, perhaps, be found to apply, in some degree, to the evidence of *other* events, by which the truth of our religion is supported.

I. In the *first* place, it will be proper to keep in mind, that we are not to conclude any thing to be false, merely because we have not *all possible* evidence of its being true. The only inquiry we have to make is, whether there be evidence enough of its truth to satisfy a reasonable mind. In matters of religion, more than this is not to be expected. It has been urged, as an objection to the credibility of Christ's resurrection, that he did not, after that event, appear openly to the whole Jewish nation, that he was seen only by "select witnesses." On the same principle, it might be objected, that religion in general is not a matter of *knowledge*, instead of being, as it now is, a

matter of belief; and no one, I suppose, will venture to affirm, that religion, if it rested on knowledge, would answer its purpose so effectually as it does at present. Had a conviction of its truth been irresistibly forced upon us, or even been the certain result of slight attention, many occasions, which are now afforded, of improving the best faculties of the mind, would have been wanting. In proportion as we are influenced by a conviction so obtained, and suffer the suspension of our freedom, we are precluded from the merit of virtue, and of course from the happiness peculiar to rational beings. The evidences of religion, proposed to us, as they now are, on the ground of *probability*, demanding the exertion of our judgment, and proving the rectitude of our will, cultivate in us the powers and dispositions, from which human happiness must necessarily arise*.

Little

* I am inclined to think, with respect to *moral truths in general*, that they are capable of no more than *probable*

Little reason have we, therefore, to envy the Apostles, the evidence of their *senses*,

bable proof; and that the term *demonstration*, when applied to them, can be admitted only in a *figurative* sense. Mr. Locke, indeed, maintains the opinion, that morality is capable of demonstration, and asserts, that we have a demonstrative knowledge of God's existence. Doubtless, on such a subject, Mr. Locke's opinion ought to have great weight. It cannot, however, be expected, considering the circumstances, under which Mr. Locke wrote, that, though he so successfully combated the errors of others, he should always be himself right. In the present case, it does not appear to me, that the reasons, which he alledges for his opinion, are at all satisfactory; and, on any other ground, he would not have wished to be followed. Dr. Samuel Clarke also, from whom I always differ with reluctance, calls his proof of the being and attributes of God a *demonstration* of them; for which, with unnecessary severity indeed, but not without some appearance of reason, he has been censured by Bolingbroke. We must not, I think, confound the knowledge we have of the existence and attributes of the Deity, or of any moral truth, to whatever degree of certainty it may arise, with *mathematical demonstration*. This would be to excite expectations, which can never be gratified. When the truth of a mathematical proposition is once made out, by a just and legitimate demonstration, we are as much assured of its truth, as we should be after seeing it demonstrated a thousand times, and in a thousand different ways; whereas our conviction of a moral truth, being susceptible of various degrees, rises, in propor-

senses, with respect to the events they record. It ought rather to be considered as

tion to the number and strength of the arguments, from the slightest probability to the confines of absolute certainty. From this constitution of things, there results this evident advantage, that, in the investigation of moral truth, there is indispensable need of a *sincere and honest mind*, patient to attend to every argument, which may be offered, and ready to give each its proper weight; an advantage peculiarly adapted to beings placed, as we are, in a state of probation and discipline. The exercise of balancing opposing evidence must greatly improve our intellectual powers, and the temptations, which immediate interest or the desire of gratifying our passions sometimes affords, of leaning to the less evidence rather than to the greater, must, if happily overcome, strengthen and establish our virtue. It seems to me, therefore, that it was never the intention of the author of our nature, that *moral* truths should admit of the same kind of proof as *mathematical* ones; but that, depending on *accumulative* evidence, they should rise higher and higher in credibility, rewarding our industry and integrity by continual *approaches* to that certainty, which yet we shall never meet. We are not, however, to conclude, from what has here been said, that the conviction, which is thus obtained, whether of the existence and attributes of God, or of any other moral truth, is less satisfactory to the mind, than if it were obtained by mathematical demonstration. The evidence, by which it is furnished, is a tower, whose height increases by every moment's observation and reflection; and, though the foundation of

as an advantage, that our conviction of them is made to depend on more *openness* to conviction, and greater *diligence of inquiry;* or, if we could doubt of its being an advantage in general, we ought to be assured of it, with respect to the particular event of our Saviour's resurrection, from his declaration to St. Thomas; "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast *seen* me, thou hast believed; blessed are they, who have not seen, and yet have believed." In truth, the ocular demonstration of our Lord's being risen, which was granted to the Apostles, was not granted to them for their own sakes, but that they might be witnesses of that event to others. They, who saw it, bare record, that *we* might *believe.* Accordingly, it was granted only to such a number, and under such circumstances, as might be sufficient to convince all, to whom

of it be humbly laid in the dust, the top soon ascends beyond the reach of the eye, and is lost amidst the clouds.

whom their testimony should come, and who would duly attend to it, that it was worthy to be received:—"he was showed openly, not to all the people, but to those witnesses, who had been chosen before of God, and who were commanded to preach and give testimony unto the people."

II. Again; as it is necessary for us to be assured, that those, on whose testimony our belief is founded, were neither themselves deceived, nor meant to deceive us; it may be proper to remark, that is it not easy to imagine, with respect to the event we are considering, how either of these could be the case. That the Apostles were themselves deceived; or, that they believed the reality of Christ's resurrection without sufficient grounds, will not, I think, appear probable to any one, who considers the several steps, by which their belief of it was confirmed. Some of them were ready enough, at first, to consider the appear-

ance

ance of their departed Master an an illusion of the senses of those, who saw him. The pretence for such an explanation was, indeed, soon removed by the *repetition* of his appearance to many different persons, and on occasions, when they saw him without any previous surprize; yet, so slow of heart were they to believe, so long did they withhold their assent, that we are sometimes ready to blame them for their incredulity. The truth is, they had to believe this extraordinary event, in opposition to their strongest and most inveterate prejudices. They had all along conceived, that Jesus, if he were the true Messiah, would at length *manifest* his character to the world, by assuming the reigns of temporal government. When, therefore, by his submitting to an ignominious death, this expectation failed, there was no alternative, but either to relinquish their prejudices, or to discredit the truth of his pretensions. Which of these, I would ask,

ask, *after* our Saviour's crucifixion, was most likely to happen? It is easy to see, that, in such a situation of things, their prejudices would gain great additional strength. Their belief of his being the Messiah, though often professed, was not strong enough to keep up their courage against the first attack of violence. As soon as they saw him fall into the hands of the rulers, they "all forsook him, and fled." During his suffering on the cross, they heard the immediate exertion of his power to deliver himself made the test of his being the Messiah, by the greatest part of the beholders; and they were ready enough to subscribe to its being a just one. Those, who were the most attached to him, though they lamented him as a *dear friend*, and a *prophet* mighty in deed and word, yet seem to have relinquished the idea of his being the *Saviour* they expected; and speak of their trust that it was he, who should *redeem Israel*, as having died with him on the cross.

Under

Under such circumstances, it is against all probability, that they should themselves believe Christ's resurrection, without having sufficient evidence of its truth.

Still less reason is there for supposing, that the Apostles intended to deceive *us*. If they did not believe, that their Master was really risen from the dead, their conduct cannot be explained by any "known principles of the human mind." They must have courted persecution, without any possible inducement. The voluntary endurance of sufferings for the sake of opinions, respecting either doctrines or facts, has ever been esteemed a proof of *sincerity* at least, whether the opinions professed were true or false. But, if the Apostles preached Jesus and the resurrection, without believing that Jesus had risen from the dead, they must have been voluntary martyrs to known falshood, and have chosen misery for misery's sake. For, considering the disposition

position of the people towards the doctrine, which they were to preach, it was evident enough, that, if the hopes of its professors were confined to *this* world, as the hopes of deceivers ever must, they would "of all men be the most miserable."

III. Further; if it be inquired, why the Jews in general were not convinced on the testimony of the Apostles, to us appearing so convincing, that Jesus was risen from the dead; it is to be remembered, that, even if this difficulty could not be solved, it would be no just reason for our rejecting such positive evidence as we possess *. It is no discredit to a proof,

* To be convinced of the truth of any thing, and to be able to answer objections to its truth, are two very different things. Even in mathematics, where no room remains for doubt, objections may be brought against a proposition, which those, who are convinced of its truth, are unable to answer. This inability, however, does not lessen their conviction in the proposition itself. They see and admit the difficulty; but rightly concluding,

proof, that we are not able, in every case, to account for *others* not seeing its force. Yet, perhaps, it would be found, on trial, that the difficulty, in the present case, is not altogether unsurmountable. *We* may wonder, that those, who had nothing to oppose to the positive testimony of the Apostles, but the assertion of the *watch* concerning what was done in their *sleep*, should reject that testimony. But our wonder will probably abate, in proportion as we place ourselves in the situation of the

cluding, that a more perfect knowledge of the subject would enable them to solve it, they suffer not themselves to doubt of a truth, which has already been sufficiently established by direct evidence.

In the mathematical schools at Cambridge, it is usual for the students, in the discussion of a *Question*, for the sake of exercising their skill, and displaying their proficiency, to bring false arguments against propositions of acknowledged and even demonstrable truth. The fallacy of these arguments is often so specious, as to elude the detection of disputants, who have made a considerable proficiency; though the arguments themselves, founded in some verbal inaccuracy, or some misconception, into which the *Act* (the defender of the Question) is unwarily led, do not, in reality, at all militate against the truth of the original proposition.

the Jews, and consider the strong prejudices, with which they had to contend. It is not very easy, indeed, to make a *due* allowance for prejudices, of which we have not ourselves experienced the dominion; but we may, I think, in the present case, see reason to make such an allowance, as will answer our purpose, and leave no necessity of resorting to the supposition of *supernatural* influence.

To trace the progress of the various prejudices, under which the Jews laboured respecting the Messiah, and to point out their several causes, would be a very curious and useful inquiry, and would best display the strength of the prejudices themselves. For the present, however, I shall be content with observing, that one great source of those prejudices was, their erroneous method of interpreting prophecies. Eager to gratify curiosity, they were accustomed to assign the full meaning of prophecies *before* the events,

to

to which they referred, came to pass; and it is natural to suppose, that they would assign the meaning most consonant to those wishes, which the imagination of their being the peculiar favourites of heaven had inspired. The person and character of the Messiah were depicted by the prophets under representations, which must have seemed utterly inconsistent with each other; and no wonder that the attempts to reconcile them, which were made antecedently to his actual appearance, and to the full display of the Gospel dispensation, were productive of mistaken notions *. Yet, from such attempts, and on

* *Sir Isaac Newton*, on a prophecy of Daniel, very justly says, "The folly of interpreters has been to foretel times and things by this prophecy, as if God designed to make them prophets. By such rashness, they have not only exposed themselves, but brought that part of Scripture into contempt. The design of God was much otherwise. He gave this, and other prophecies in the Old Testament, not to gratify men's curiosity, by enabling them to foreknow things; but that, after they are fulfilled, they might be interpreted by the event; and his own providence, not the interpreter's,

on interpretations so made, they had formed their ideas of a Messiah. How erroneous those ideas were, is now sufficiently known; but it seems not enough considered, that, being once formed, and apparently on an authority, which was acknowledged to be divine, they were not to be corrected without great difficulty.

It may, however, be thought, that the sight of a *single miracle* by the hand of our

preter's, be then fulfilled." This at least is the case of those prophecies, which were intended, by their fulfilment, to become evidences of the truth of Revelation. If, as is supposed by some, there are any in the book of *Revelation*, which refer to times, when the designs of God respecting us shall be completed, when the season of probation shall be over, and *faith* be superseded by *sight*, they are to be considered in a light somewhat different; rather as conditional promises of reward, than as absolute predictions of events. But if, as has lately been suggested *, the prophecies of that Book, especially those relating to the *Millenium*, are to be referred to the period, when Christ will reign on earth, not in *person*, but in the *universal operation of his religion*, the season of probation may not be *entirely* over, even when those prophecies shall be fulfilled.

* See *Illustrations of Prophecy*, 2 vol. 8vo. 14s. 1796.

our Saviour, ought instantly to have convinced them of their mistake. But the Jews had been taught by Scripture, that "signs and wonders" alone were not an *infallible* criterion of a messenger from God *. They were ready, therefore, when no other interpretation suited their purpose, to ascribe them to the power of the Devil; and, as they took for granted, that *their* ideas of the Messiah were supported by divine authority, it was in perfect consistence with principles, which are *often acted on*, though certainly not *justifiable* ones, that they rejected every pretender to the character, who did not correspond to those ideas.

"But why should the Jews," it has been asked, "even though we might account

* See Deuteronomy, Chap. xiii. See also the case of the Egyptian magicians in the 7th and 8th Chapters of Exodus. We may add, though the observation be not applicable to the present point, that, in the case of our Saviour's temptation, where a miracle seems to have been wrought, the detection of its not being from God was made from the *purpose*, for which it was alledged.

count for their withstanding the evidence of Jesus' being the Messiah, at least not abstain from *persecuting* him? why should they exercise their malice and hatred against a man, whose miracles were works of mercy*?" To this we may reply, that, if the Jews had persecuted Jesus for his miracles, as being *works of mercy*, their conduct would not have been altogether inexplicable. We have still too many instances, in which, through the envy or malice of men, virtue is persecuted, and persecuted for its own sake. This, however, with respect to the generality of the Jews, does not appear to have been the case. They persecuted him, because *by* those miracles he professed to demonstrate, that he was the *Messiah*. "For a good work," say they, "we stone thee not; but for *blasphemy*, and

* This, as well as some other things contained in this Discourse, was said in reference to passages in a *well-written*, but (as I think) *injudicious* Sermon, by the learned *Dr. Thomas Edwards*, on the Heathen and Jewish rejection of the Christian miracles.

and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God." It was thus, that they always understood him. Accordingly, we find them constantly objecting to his pretensions, from their *preconceived opinions* of the Messiah. Jesus could not be the Christ, they thought, "because they knew whence he was;" or, "because he came out of Galilee;" and even his disciples were ready to abandon him, on the suggestion that he should be cut off, being persuaded, "that Christ was to *abide for ever.*" It is true, that, if the Jews had reasoned *rightly*, they would have considered our Saviour's miracles, in conjunction with the innocency of his *life*, and the moral tendency of his *doctrines*, as a sufficient evidence of his coming from God. To *this* mode of deciding did Christ himself challenge them. "Which of you convicteth me of *sin?* and, if I say the *truth*, why do ye not believe me?" It was a mode, of which themselves, in *words*, acknowledged the

reasonableness and rectitude; for they say expressly, in justification of their rejecting him, "We know, that this man is a sinner." But, surely, it is not incumbent on us to show, that they acted on the principles of *right reason*. It is a sufficient answer to the objection, if it appears, that they acted as men in their situation may *well be supposed* to act. Undoubtedly, the Jews were *culpable* in rejecting our Saviour, and culpable in a very high degree; but their fault was by no means of a *peculiar* nature. It might be *higher in degree*, but it was of the *same kind* with faults, which are daily committed. There are still, it is to be feared, by far too many, who suffer prejudices to render them blind to very strong evidence of truth; especially when, as in the case of the *rulers* among the Jews (which may be considered as rather different from that of the *people*) their prejudices are supported by *wordly considerations* *.

IV. Lastly,

* "They, (i. e. the *council* gathered by the chief priests and pharisees) took council together to put Jesus to

IV. Lastly, with respect to the accounts, which are delivered to us of Christ's resurrection by the Apostles, we must keep in mind, that, as each of them mentioned such circumstances of that event, as came more immediately within his knowledge, or suited his particular purpose, some *diversity* in their narratives is to be expected. This diversity, indeed, must necessarily take place, where different persons, who do not act in concert with each other, give narratives of an event, which consists of *many parts*, and is attended with a *train of circumstances*. As it has been the aim of Infidels to construe this diversity into a *contradiction*, to the discredit of the event itself; so has it been the successful endeavour of several

to death," lest, in consequence of men's believing on him, "the Romans should come, and take away their place and nation." It was necessary to *persuade* the *multitude* to be accessories in this crime. It seems, indeed, that a *little* persuasion was sufficient. Mankind are soon excited to be *mad* against goodness; soon prevailed on to ask the life of *Barabbas* rather than of *Jesus*.

several Christian writers to show, that the accounts, which are given by the different Evangelists, are perfectly consistent; and I cannot, perhaps, do better, after offering these preparatory remarks, than refer you to the advantage, which may be derived from their learned and pious labours *.

* See, in particular, *Ditton* on the Resurrection; *West* on the Resurrection; Trial of the Witnesses (an elegant and pleasing little tract) supposed to be written by *Bp. Sherlock;* and, above all, *Townson's* Discourse on the Evangelical history, from the Interment to the Ascension.

DISCOURSE XI.

On the Resurrection of Christ, as a proof of a general Resurrection *.

1 CORINTHIANS XV. 20.

NOW IS CHRIST RISEN FROM THE DEAD, AND BECOME THE FIRST-FRUITS OF THEM THAT SLEPT.

OF such importance did the resurrection of Christ appear to St. Paul, that he was content to rest the defence of his religion on the truth of it. Considering this as the grand fortress of Christianity, he confessed, that, if it should be found untenable, both his preaching and the faith of his hearers were vain. It is evident, indeed, from the nature of the event itself, and from the circumstance of Christ's having predicted it, that, if it did

* Preached on *Easter Day*.

did *not* happen, the truth of the Christian religion might reasonably be called in question. St. Paul, therefore, in order to preclude any doubts, which might arise on this subject, reminds the Corinthians on what numerous and respectable testimony their belief of Christ's resurrection was founded. The occasion of his doing this was, not a denial of that fact, but some erroneous opinions entertained by those converts, which were inconsistent with the doctrine of a *general* resurrection. The Apostle considered these as so dependent on each other, that they both must stand or fall together. "If," says he, "the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised." On the contrary, he contends, that, if the fact of Christ's resurrection is once established, it follows, as a necessary consequence, that there will be a *general* resurrection of the dead. "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept."

In

In a former Discourse on the subject of our Saviour's resurrection, I endeavoured, by making such remarks as seemed adapted to give the evidence we have of that event its due effect, to establish the belief of its truth. To complete the purpose I had in view, it shall be the business of the present occasion to consider the connection, asserted by St. Paul, between *Christ's* resurrection and our own, and to show the sense, in which he is the "first-fruits of them that sleep." In order to this, it will be necessary to take a retrospective view of the condition of man.

I. Though man was originally endued with a capacity of obedience and happiness, it was a necessary consequence of his being left a *free agent*, that he might fall from both. This, we are informed by revelation, was actually the case. Adam and Eve, the first of our race, by transgressing the command, which had been

been given as the test and exercise of their obedience, *rebelled* against their Maker*. How this affected their *own* happi-

* In the case of our first parents, who, though *perfect*, were *fallible* beings, and who, from their particular situation, had but little opportunity for the practice of *moral* duties, by which they might strengthen the principle of obedience to the divine will, there was a kind of necessity for the institution of some *positive* duty, either of active exertion, or of voluntary forbearance, by which their regard to the Creator might be shown, and a habit of obedience to him kept up. For this purpose, and under such circumstances, nothing seems more proper, even in the eye of reason, than the prohibition of some enjoyment of the *senses*, to which, from the constitution of their appetites, there would be a perpetual temptation; a consideration, which, in my opinion, is alone a sufficient reply to the profane cavils of infidelity on the *insignificance*, as it has been termed, of the ground, on which the doctrine of the fall of man and its important consequences is founded. Besides, the inclination, which we feel towards forbidden things, merely because they are forbidden, makes it evident, that, in the discipline of a moral being, it is no *trivial* measure to forbid *any* thing.

It well deserves to be considered, though the consideration does not belong to the subject before us, how far this remark may be extended to the obligation of observing the *Sabbath;* even supposing, what certainly, in the present state of the world, is not the fact, that no other

happiness, we can have no great difficulty in conceiving. The natural product of sin

other advantage resulted from its observance. Though there is not now the same necessity for positive institutions, as in the case of Adam and Eve, we may be certain, whenever they are appointed by divine authority, that they are proper and expedient. Now, after all just allowances are made for the peculiar situation of the *Jews*, to whom, as some think, the observance of the Sabbath was first enjoined, we may safely affirm, that the observance of it is obligatory, by that authority, on all men. The reasons, which are alledged for its observance in the 4th commandment, apply equally to men of every age and every country. Such an observance of it, therefore, as is enjoined in that commandment, is of *perpetual* obligation; or, however, is not abrogated by the abrogation of *Jewish* rites. The consideration, that God had delivered the Israelites from bondage, was indeed alledged as an additional *motive* for their observing this particular command, and for observing it with peculiar strictness. This motive, not being applicable to us, cannot with propriety be urged on us; but we ought not therefore to conclude, that we are set free from the *obligation* of the command.

I remember it as the remark of a pious friend, and it is certainly founded in truth, that there is nothing, for which the *Jews*, among all the instances of their disobedience to the divine commands, were so severely reprehended by the Prophets, as for their neglect of the *Sabbath*. Can it be said, that *Christians* are not deserving of reprehension on the same ground? Not to

sin is shame and misery. Accordingly, the *immediate* consequence of their transgression was, an indisposition towards that, which should have been the *basis* of their happiness, *converse with their Maker.* When they had notice of the approach of God, instead of meeting him with transports of gratitude and praise, they endeavoured, with fear and trembling, to hide themselves from his view *. It was necessary

to mention how necessary the frequent recurrence of public religious ordinances evidently is to the preservation of religion itself, especially among the bulk of mankind, it does not seem to be sufficiently considered what a direct tendency disobedience to a positive command has to lessen the sense of religious obligations in general. The disregard to the Sabbath, which is visible among many persons of rank, is scarcely less to be deplored for the effect, which it must have on their own minds, than for the effect, which it too evidently has on the minds of those, who are chiefly directed by authority and example. Well did the French rulers understand the connection between religion and the observance of the Sabbath as a divine institution, when, intending to destroy the former, they introduced a division of time, which amounted to an abolition of the latter, and which led to the violation of a received law of God.

* Gen. iii. 8.

necessary also to the happiness of such a being as man, that his appetites and passions should be in a state of subjection to his reason. But, by an act of indulgence in a forbidden instance, he had both increased the strength of his appetites and passions, and lessened his power to control them. Thus was an advantage given to the sensual over the rational parts of his nature, which degraded him from the rank of perfect beings, and took from him the ability of unerring obedience. He was no longer at liberty, in all cases, to refuse the evil, and to choose the good. For, though he was not under an absolute *necessity* of going wrong, he had rejected the natural means of going right. Having withdrawn his trust from God, from that Being, who before was his never-failing guide, he was deprived of an assistance very needful for his direction, and was liable to error at every step; and, even when his judgment could instruct him in the right, the opposition of his

his will often disabled him from pursuing it. So that Adam and Eve had not only forfeited the favour of their Maker by this *first* act of disobedience, but had rendered themselves incapable of deserving it for the future. Their knowledge of good and evil, since it was *partial* only, far from answering the purpose they had hoped from it, served but to increase their unhappiness, opening their eyes to evils, which they could not remedy, and oppressing them with a weight of duty, which they were unable to support *.

Knowing

* The tree, of which Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat, was, with much propriety, named the "*tree of the knowledge of good and evil;*" for, as this was the test of their obedience, moral evil had no other approach to them; nor could they, before their transgression, have acquired the idea of it. The prediction of the serpent, that they should be "as Gods, knowing good and evil," was literally fulfilled; but it was left for them to discover, by fatal experience, that though knowledge, as an attribute of the Deity, is in him a source of happiness, yet to beings, whose ideas arise from *sensible* impressions, *every* increase of knowledge is not an increase of happiness. In many things, it may be said with philosophic strictness, that "ignorance is bliss."

Knowing that a God, who is perfection itself, and who had made man perfect in his kind, required an *undeviating* obedience to his will, they were conscious of their inability to perform it. Feeling the anguish of mind, which would ever attend a failure in their duty, they foresaw, that a failure must often happen; nor had they reason to expect *less* evil from their misconduct, than to live, for a time, under the pains of disease and remorse, and then to mingle with the dust for ever.

How the sin of our first parents affected their *posterity*, it may not be so easy to discern; but, that it did affect them, is asserted by Scripture, and confirmed by experience. It is not, indeed, necessary to imagine, that the *guilt* of Adam's transgression was imputed to any but himself; but it cannot be denied, whatever difficulty may attend the explanation of the fact, that all men, after the example of Adam, have been under the

dominion of sin, and, by being mortal, have suffered, in some degree, the *punishment* of sin. Whatever difference of opinion there may be, respecting the *cause* of man's depravity, or the scheme of his redemption from the effects of it, there is no one, I conceive, who, admitting the authority of Scripture, will deny, that the depravity itself has extended to every individual of the human race, that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" and that, therefore, the benefit of redemption is necessary to all. To those, however, who admit that authority, there is, surely, no great room for doubt, either about the cause of man's depravity and consequent mortality, or about the ground of his redemption. The Apostle, in the two verses immediately following the text, expressly assigns the origin both of the disease and the remedy. "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For, as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall

shall all be made alive." Thus *death* and a *resurrection* from death were the consequences, the one of *sin*, and the other of *righteousness;* and, as *Adam* was our representative and leader in the one, so *Christ* is our representative and leader in the other. "As, by one man's *disobedience*, many were made sinners; so, by the *obedience* of one, shall many be made righteous." Though the disobedience of Adam did not, of itself, make us sinners; yet, by putting us into a situation, in which we could not, morally speaking, avoid sinning, it gave *occasion* to our being sinners; and, by subjecting us to mortality, put us under the physical necessity of being treated as sinners. In like manner, the obedience of Christ, though not the *immediate* cause of our being righteous, yet, by the conditions and means of salvation it procures for us, it is the *occasion* of many becoming righteous, and the reason of all being so far treated as righteous, as to be raised from death to life.

As sin and misery are naturally connected, the punishment of death, which was originally denounced against sin, understood as putting a period to the existence of the sinner, and considered as the *whole* of God's design respecting him, was a dispensation of *mercy*; and would, doubtless, have been put in strict execution, if no method could have been devised, by which the progress of sin might be checked, and its natural tendencies diverted*. This, however, God, in his wisdom and goodness, effected. Not resting in merely freeing us from misery, he restored us to a capacity of happiness. Through the merits of a Redeemer, fallen man, though dead, was to be raised again to life, and judged by a law adapted to his fallen condition; a law requiring only that measure of obedience, which, by the exertion of his sincere

* Besides, death (extinction of being) seems the natural punishment of degenerate creatures; since, by their degeneracy, they cease to answer the end of their existence.

sincere *endeavours*, and the due use of the assistance afforded him, he should be able to render. Thus it was, that "mercy and truth were made to meet, that righteousness and peace kissed each other."

Whether the circumstance of our being so raised will prove a blessing or a curse is, indeed, left to be determined by ourselves. As there will be a resurrection both of the just and unjust, some may rise to misery. But this, though a consideration of alarm, is no reasonable objection against the scheme of our redemption; least of all can it consistently be urged by those, who pride themselves on the freedom of their actions. As the necessary effect of a general law, it is agreeable to the method, in which it pleases God in *all* instances to govern us; and we might thence conclude, had we no other reason to do so, that it is productive of good on the whole. We do not know, that the *possibility* of evil could

have been avoided. If mankind in general had remained in innocence, individuals would have been *liable* to depart from it. Besides, in remedy of incidental evil, provisions may be made, with which we are not yet acquainted. In any case, no one can reasonably complain of a dispensation, which has his advantage so much for its object, and which fails of attaining it only by his own fault. All are sufficiently taught, by their experience here, that mercy abused generally turneth into vengeance; but no one, on that account, would give up the consolation and privileges, to which the general promises of mercy entitle him; nor, with respect to the instance in question, would he, at the beginning of life, if capable of the choice, willingly resign the hope of reviving after death, from the *hazard* of its proving a resurrection to damnation.

It may, perhaps, be said, that, since mortality actually followed, man himself paid

paid the penalty of his transgression; and that, therefore, this mode of redemption, however *well-intended*, was plainly *ineffectual*. To this objection an answer has already been suggested. We may add, more distinctly, that man did not pay the *whole* penalty of his transgression; that, notwithstanding the remaining evils of a fallen state, the benefits of redemption are abundantly manifest, and demand our most grateful acknowledgements. It is not essential to the notion of redemption, that it should replace men in exactly the *same situation*, in which they were before. It is sufficient, if it restores them to a *capacity* of attaining, on reasonable and practicable conditions, the happiness they had forfeited. It was not merely *dying*, according to the sense we now entertain of dying; not merely a *temporary* deprivation of sense, but a continuance *for ever* in a state of insensibility, that was the least, which could be meant when, as a threatening warn-

ing, it was announced to Adam, "In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die;" and when, as a judicial sentence, it was declared to him, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." From this, then, it was, that Christ redeemed us. Man was still left to suffer *some* of the consequences of his deviation from rectitude. His reason, which he had chosen as his guide, was still to be his chief security against many of the evils, to which he was exposed. He was still, in pursuance of that sentence, which had so solemnly been pronounced, to pass through the gates of death *. But, for the *sake*, and after the *example* of Christ, he was to be delivered from this universal conqueror, and awakened to a life,

* Possibly, after the introduction of sin, such a renovation of the nature of man, as could not be effected but by his suffering death, or a change adequate to death, was neeessary, in order to his happiness. "We shall not all *sleep;* but we shall *all* be changed.—For this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality."

a life, in which, if it were not for his own fault, he would enjoy happiness for ever.

II. As, then, the resurrection of the dead was the great object proposed by redemption, it seemed proper, that both the *possibility* and the *reality* of it should be clearly ascertained. Accordingly, it has pleased God to ascertain them to us in the most satisfactory manner. The resurrection of Christ is an experimental proof, that the resurrection of the dead is a thing *possible in itself.* For, though his resurrection be not a strict representation of ours, as to the *mode* and circumstances of it, since his body did not see corruption; yet it is an event so much of the same nature, that no one can reasonably question, whether the power, which raised up Jesus, *can* also raise up us. That departure of the animating principle, which constitutes our idea of death, undoubtedly took place in our

our Saviour; and, when once this principle is gone, we know of no power, less than that of the almighty Creator, which can recall it. There seems no *essential* difference between re-animating a lifeless *mass* of matter, and re-animating the parts of matter when *dispersed*. Both are equally beyond the power of human comprehension. If, therefore, we know, that one has actually been done, we have no pretence, from the mere *difficulty* of the thing, for supposing, that the other may not also be done. It hence follows, that, whether the body, in which the dead shall rise, will be the same with that, which was deposited in the grave, or not; whether the soul be material or immaterial; whether its union with the body be continued after death; or whether, being then separated, they will afterwards be re-united; are questions, which, however curious in the discussion, and however they may be determined, as they refer only to the *manner*, in which the dead shall

shall be raised, affect not the belief, that the thing itself is possible. The proper evidence of this is the resurrection of Christ. Accordingly, St. Paul, in his beautiful descant on the subject, rests the proof of the *possibility*, as well as of the *certainty*, of the general resurrection, on the fact of *Christ's* resurrection; and, with respect to the difficulty of conceiving *how* the dead are raised, he is content with opposing it by analogous changes, the objects of daily observation, around us. It is, I think, a mistake to imagine, that the Apostle intended these analogies as proofs. It is no *proof*, if indeed it be any *presumption*, of *our* reviving after death, that plants spring up from corrupted seeds; though, when the fact is otherwise established, it is a very apt illustration of it. Well might we conclude, notwithstanding the force of such analogies as this, that, if Christ be not risen, *our* hope of rising is vain.

But

But further, the resurrection of Christ is a proof, not only that a general resurrection of the dead is *possible*, but that it will *really take place*. He, who raised up Christ, not only *can*, but *will* also raise up us. By the resurrection of Christ from the dead, we have the strongest assurance possible, that his mission was divine. If Christ had been an imposter, the imposition must have ceased at his death. He evidently could not, by any thing merely human, *raise himself* from the dead. It must, in any case, have been a power extraneous to himself as a *man*, that could make good *this* test of his being the Messiah; and that power must have been exerted by one, who meant to give his sanction to the truth of what Jesus had said. It was, indeed, a test the most decisive. For, who but *God* can raise the dead? Accordingly, it was to this that our Saviour appealed, as the strongest evidence he could give of his having come forth from God. His answers

swers to those, who asked of him a sign from heaven of his divine mission, were generally such as comprehended his resurrection from the dead. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."—"There shall no sign be given to this generation, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For, as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." Since, then, God, by raising Jesus from the dead, has given us assurance, that what Jesus saith is true, there can be no doubt that the dead will rise; for nothing is more certain, not only that he has expressly said they will, but that he insists on it as the great end and object of his coming. "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will, which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me, I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day."—

day."—"The hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves, shall hear his voice, and shall come forth."

The resurrection of Christ is, therefore, in the *first* place, a proof of the certainty of ours, by the evidence, which it affords, of the *divine authority of his mission.* It is a still clearer *declaration* of it, if not a further *confirmation,* by being itself an *instance* of what it meant to prove. It was a declaration of God's gracious intention respecting us, which none could possibly mistake. *Words* may be misunderstood; at least, may be less intelligible to some than to others; but *facts* are equally intelligible to all men; and there was an evident propriety, that an intention, in which all were equally concerned, should be expressed in a language, which all might equally understand.

Besides, it was fit that he, who, by bearing our sins in his own body on the tree,

tree, was our representative in undergoing the *penalty* of sin*, should also, for our consolation and hope, be an instance and earnest of our *recovery* from the penalty. It was fit, that he should, in a ministerial character, be "the first-born from the dead." As it behoved the captain of our salvation to be made like unto his brethren in temptations, sufferings, and death, that he might be able to succour those, who are in such tribulations; so it is necessary for us, in order that we may obtain the full reward he purchased for us, to be made like unto *him*, in his conquest over them. He is now, therefore, in *all* things, our leader and guide. As, by our *natural* condition, we shall follow him in death; so, by the *grace* he has procured for us, we shall follow him in his restoration to life. "If we be dead with Christ, we shall also live with

* This may be said, without admitting, that Christ underwent exactly the *same* penalty, which we had incurred. It is the language of Scripture, that "Christ *died* for our sins."

with him." As Christ, who is our head, is risen; so shall we, who are the members of his body, also rise. "As the first-fruits, among the Jews, were a pledge and earnest of a future harvest; so the resurrection of Christ is justly styled the first-fruits of them that slept; because it is an earnest of that general harvest, which shall be at the end of the world, when the angels, the reapers, shall come to gather the elect from the four winds*."

Great reason have we, therefore, to esteem the dispensation, which has made known to us such important intelligence; and to say, with St. Peter, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." Had it not been for the grace purchased for us by Christ, we should not have been entitled

* Tillotson.

entitled to the privilege of reviving after death; and though, without having the Gospel actually made known to us, we might have enjoyed the advantage of Christ's intercession in this respect; yet we should have wanted the consolation arising from the previous knowledge of it. We should have wanted the assurance, which alone can smooth the horrors of death, and without which it seems wonderful that any, who duly considered the subject, have been able to bring themselves to a tolerable degree of tranquillity *. We may now, being freed from the fear, by which others all their lifetime have been kept in bondage, consider the present life, though short and full of trouble, as the sure *path* to a valuable inherit-

* The effect of redemption through Christ was meant, no doubt, to extend to men of every age and nation. Those, however, to whom the Gospel is actually preached, have peculiar advantages. Life and immortality, though purchased for *all* men, were *brought to light* (fully illustrated) only through the Gospel, and are therefore visible (or, at least, *clearly* seen) only by Christians.

inheritance, and death as the *entrance* into it. We have now only to take care, by a performance of the conditions, on which salvation has been wrought for us, that our resurrection be not unto condemnation, but unto glory.

DISCOURSE XII.

On the coming of Christ, as tending to destroy the dominion *of sin* *.

1 JOHN iii. 8.

FOR THIS PURPOSE THE SON OF GOD WAS MANIFESTED, THAT HE MIGHT DESTROY THE WORKS OF THE DEVIL.

IT is with great reason, that the Scriptures so frequently caution us against entertaining such an idea of redemption, as should be consistent with our continuing in sin. There is no error, into which men were more likely to fall, and none, which would more effectually frustrate the *intention* of the Gospel. It was to be expected, that some would be industrious to discover, and others as ready to

* Preached on *Christmas Day*.

to admit, interpretations of revelation, which were favourable to their propensities and habits; that a degenerate race, though *desirous* of the salvation that was offered them, would be glad to receive it on easier conditions than a *return to righteousness.* To those, who had been long estranged from the life of God, through the blindness of their hearts, it must have been an acceptable doctrine, to have a Saviour preached to them, who would protect them from the ills they apprehended, without any painful exertions of their own; and who would excuse them, by his merits, from an observance of the "holy commandment delivered to them:" but it would be altogether astonishing, considering how the Scriptures have guarded us against such a delusion, that any, who founded their religion on the Scriptures, should ever have been deceived by it, unless we were also aware, how much men's opinions are liable to be directed by their inclinations. Nothing

is

is more certain than that, while human nature remains as it is, no scheme of redemption, which did not destroy the dominion of sin, could have been effectual to our happiness. If man lives in sin, he must also live in misery. The punishment of death, which was originally denounced against sin, if considered as the *whole* of God's design respecting fallen man, was a *merciful* dispensation; and would, doubtless, in mercy have been put in strict execution, if no method could have been devised, by which the progress of sin might be checked, and its natural tendencies diverted *. We cannot, therefore, consider our religion in a more important view, than as it is adapted to check this progress, and to divert these tendencies. The more it is calculated to restore us to the happiness, of which we were originally capable, and for which we were originally designed, the greater must be its excellence, and the more is it

* See the preceding Discourse.

it entitled to our veneration and esteem. We may, indeed, fairly presume, and it is our duty to believe, that the Christian scheme is the *most* excellent, which could have been devised. An attempt to *show* this, however, might well be deemed presumptuous. We see so small a part of God's designs, that we cannot, with any reasonable prospect of success, institute a comparison between them, and assign the degree of preference, which is due to each; much less can we compare any of them with others, which we imagine *might* have been adopted. But, to consider the advantages of that method, which it has pleased God actually to make use of, may be both a pious and a useful contemplation. The more exactly we understand its true nature and tendency, the higher undoubtedly will be our admiration and gratitude at the wisdom and goodness displayed in it; and the more careful shall we be, to make ourselves capable of the blessings, which it is adapted to procure us.

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We have seen, in the preceding Discourse, in what sense Christ delivered us from the *punishment* of sin. Let us now, as an exercise suitable to the present solemnity, consider the way, in which the appointment of Christ's appearance in the flesh tended to deliver us from the *dominion* of sin. "For this purpose," says the Apostle, "the Son of God was manifested, that he might *destroy the works of the devil.*"

I. We may, in the *first* place, observe, that it tended to this end, by giving men a sensible evidence of God's *hatred to sin.* Sin is, indeed, so repugnant even to our depraved nature, that men cannot, in early instances at least, be guilty of it in any high degree, without doing violence to their own convictions, and incurring, by the reproaches of their conscience, the sentence of God's displeasure. In proportion, however, as our inclinations become more corrupt, the reproaches of

conscience will be less severe; and, when our depravity is the greatest, our sense of it will probably be the least. This, if it were the case of an *individual* or two, where all around them continued upright, would not be one, of which we ought entirely to despair. The many external checks they must meet with, would frequently force them to a reflection and comparison, which would keep alive their *sense of duty*, and afford some chance of reformation. But, in the case, where such depravity is become *universal*, where the temptations to sin are multiplied beyond computation, and a submission to them recommended by the example of those, whom we are naturally disposed to imitate, and where the clamours of conscience are silenced by the applause of our associates in the same guilt; there is but little probability, that any *human* means would be effectual to produce a conviction of our deplorable state, or to restore a due sense of our obligation to obey the will of God.

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This seems, in fact, to have been the general case of the Gentile world. Philosophers, indeed, by diligent investigation into the nature and relations of things, were able to trace out most of the lines of duty. Their morality, however, for the most part, rested in *theory*. For want of seeing the true force of moral obligations, and for want of motives sufficiently strong to resist temptation, the rectification of their wills seldom kept pace with the improvement of their understandings; and, whatever influence their knowledge might have on their own conduct, it certainly had but little influence on the conduct of others; nor did their instructions serve to much further purpose, with regard to *general* utility, than to show the insufficiency of human means alone to effect the reformation of the world. The generality of men neither understood the *obligation* to obedience, nor were sensible how far they fell short of fulfilling it. In such circumstances, it was not

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to be expected, that the mere teaching of morality, especially if it wanted the sanction of divine authority, would produce any great or extensive change. However reasonable might be the precepts, yet the obligation to observe them, scarcely intelligible perhaps to the generality of men, was not likely to be admitted in opposition to appetites and passions long accustomed to indulgence; and the Heathen philosophers, had they been equally *zealous* to inculcate moral truth, might, with still more reason than the inspired prophet, have complained, that they addressed themselves to a "disobedient and gain-saying people."

But, though men were unteachable in this way, they were not *altogether* so, nor altogether incorrigible. The assurance, that such a person as Christ came into the world to *save* us, was still likely to produce a powerful effect on the minds of all, who were capable of the least reflexion.

reflexion. The *fact itself*, independently of the *manner*, in which it was intended to affect them, was a sufficient indication, that something in them was materially wrong, and that they were under the dread sentence of God's displeasure. But, when it was further made known, that the price of their peace with God, was the merit of Christ's *obedience* in our nature; it must have awakened the sense of their *obligation* to obedience, and convinced them of the heinousness of that conduct, which had set them at enmity with God. "As, by one man's *disobedience*, many were made sinners; so, by the *obedience* of one, many were to be made righteous." When it pleased God to re-instate us in that favour, from which our departure from righteousness had displaced us, he made it the condition of doing so, that *he*, on whose account we were restored, should exhibit an instance of the duty, to which we were originally obliged; and we cannot but conclude, from

from this, not only that obedience is highly *acceptable* to God, but that it is a necessary means of obtaining his favour; that all, who would enjoy the benefits of an *obedient* Saviour's intercession, must *themselves obey* according to the utmost of their power.

II. *Secondly*, as the appointment of Christ's appearance in the flesh was thus a sensible demonstration to mankind of God's *hatred to sin;* so the *circumstances*, under which our Saviour was manifested, fully evinced the *malignity* of sin, and its inconsistence with the happiness of rational beings. It must be attributed to the baneful nature of sin, that our Saviour's obedience was effected through such *bitter sufferings;* and this instance of its banefulness is, surely, the most awakening, that can well be conceived. The sufferings of *any* virtuous character naturally excite our compassion; and, when they are occasioned by *injustice*, rouse

rouse our indignation against the cause. No one can contemplate the death of Socrates, or of any virtuous and good man, who, in similar situations, has fallen a sacrifice to the ignorance or malice of men, without lamenting the depravity, which gave wisdom and virtue so unworthy a reception, and without feeling some *shame* for the race, to which he is allied. Where, however, the sufferer is a man like ourselves, there may be a pretence for lessening our concern, by transferring a *part* of the blame to himself. Though we may allow him to be wise and virtuous *in general*, and deserving of better treatment on the *whole*; yet we are always at liberty to suspect, that, in the particular instance, in which he incurred the judgment and punishment of men, he might be *imprudent* at least, if not otherwise reprehensible. Or, if we cannot thus persuade ourselves, that virtue is not for its *own sake* sometimes persecuted; we then comfort ourselves with

with the belief, that the individuals, who did persecute it, had attained to a peculiar *height* in wickedness; that they are not to be considered as a *specimen* of our nature, or as exhibiting the *prevailing* dispositions of mankind; and that, therefore, no conclusions respecting ourselves can be drawn from their behaviour. But, when we are informed of the treatment, which our blessed Saviour met with in the world, we can find no such excuse for human nature; we can neither plead in extenuation of the depravity, from which that treatment proceeded, nor evade the charge of very general depravity, which it involves. "He was meek and lowly in heart: he did no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth." He was disposed, by his perfect benevolence, to make it the business of his life to *do good;* and he was enabled, by his perfect wisdom, to pursue what he purposed by the most proper methods. Yet, what return did he experience? Did men strive with each

each other, who should most esteem and reverence him? Did they, to manifest their gratitude and joy, make him a partaker of all the conveniences and comforts, which mortals can bestow? No. This, it seems, was not the character, which *men* delighted to honour. He himself tells us, that the "world *hated* him." He was despised and rejected of men. He, like his disciples after him for his sake, was "persecuted from city to city;" nor had he "where to lay his head." He had perpetually to engage in the most painful conflicts against ignorance, prejudice, and passion; and, at length, fell a victim to their prevalence, in an ignominious death. When we consider, that such a Person was so dealt with, we cannot but acknowledge, that the disposition of men was adverse to goodness; that wisdom and virtue, far from being the objects of their love and imitation, could expect no security among them. Nor can we avoid this conclusion, by imagining,

imagining, that those, who thus conducted themselves towards our Saviour, were wicked in any very *extraordinary* degree. The Jews, we know, with respect to morality and religion, had long been possessed of peculiar advantages. They had long enjoyed opportunities of improvement far superior to those enjoyed by other nations; and, though they had not made the best use of the opportunities afforded them, it would be difficult to show, that any other nation would have made a better. Be this, however, as it may, there is certainly no reason to suppose, taking things as they actually were, that the people could then have been found on earth, among whom our Saviour's reception would have been materially different *. This being acknowledged,

* The readers of history will not fail to recollect with what danger evidences of exalted merit were displayed among the *Greeks* and *Romans;* and that it was not without reason considered as a rare occurrence, when "magna aliqua ac nobilis virtus vicit ac supergressa

ledged, the direct tendency of the acknowledgment must be to awaken, in every individual, a suspicion of his own principles, and a sense of his own imperfections; for we may fairly presume, that all *ingenuous* minds, while they condemn such conduct in others, will entertain some doubt whether, in similar circumstances, they might not have incurred the same guilt.

That there is at least *reason* enough for such an apprehension, even in the best of men, we may learn from the instance of St. Paul. With respect to him, it cannot be uncharitable to suppose, that the spirit, which operated with such fury against the disciples of our Lord, would not have been more lenient to our Lord himself; that the hands, which took part in

gressa est vitium, parvis magnisque civitatibus commune, *ignorantiam recti* et *invidiam*." *Tacit.* Sometimes, on reviewing the observation, to which this note refers, I feel a painful apprehension, that it may be extended to nations professing Christianity.

in stoning *him*, who first laid down his life for the testimony of Jesus, would probably, if circumstances had led to it, have assisted in nailing Jesus to the cross. Now, who will venture to imagine, that, with St. Paul's opportunities, he should have been better than St. Paul? that, unassisted by Christian principles, he could with more sincerity have professed, that "he had ever lived in good conscience before God?" In truth, independently of Christian principles, it is not easy to conceive a case more favourable to right conduct, than that of St. Paul. If bare acquaintance with moral truths, as discoverable by the light of nature, had been sufficient to bring men to a just sense of themselves, and to a behaviour suitable to their situation, certainly he, who had so much more than this, who had been "taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was so zealous towards God," would not have been guilty of crimes, which approached

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so near to killing the "Lord of life." He would have had no need of the teaching of Christianity to convince him, that "all men have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;" much less would it have happened, that himself was so eminent an *instance* of human depravity *.

Thus does the appearance of Christ among us, and the reception he met with, teach us, by a lesson which all may understand, how deficient men are in moral goodness, and how unable, by any thing themselves could do, to supply the defect. Convincing us of our unworthiness, and our need of God's mercy, it naturally disposes us to *humility*, and every Christian grace. For, whoever acknowledges the truth of our religion; whoever believes, that Jesus was the Christ, and that, coming in the perfection of our nature, he was obliged, in the course of his obedience,

* See the case of St. Paul more fully considered in Discourse VI.

dience, to endure such "contradiction of sinners against himself," will perceive the true nature and tendency of sin. Alarmed at the malignity of a principle, which could produce such dire effects, he will not rest satisfied with himself, while he feels it reigning within him. Sensible, that, by sinning, he approves the conduct of sinners, in some sense "crucifying to himself the Son of God afresh," he will hasten to correct all his evil inclinations, and will joyfully embrace the means, which the Gospel affords, to obtain a conquest over sin, to strengthen his obedience, and "establish him in every good word and work."

DISCOURSE XIII.

On the tendency of Christianity to promote benevolence.

JOHN xiii. 35.

BY THIS SHALL ALL MEN KNOW THAT YE ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YE HAVE LOVE ONE TO ANOTHER.

IT must necessarily excite a prejudice in favour of any religion, that the distinguishing character of its professors is *benevolence;* and it might reasonably be expected, that, if *all* the professors of the Gospel answered to the description here given by our Saviour of his disciples, its reception in the world would soon be universal. A religion so recommended could not fail to command admiration and esteem; and all would be ready to

acknowledge, that the doctrine, from which such godlike effects proceeded, had fair pretensions for asserting, that its origin was divine. How it happened, that Christianity has long since been deprived of this glorious boast, it is not very difficult to discover. It is evident, that, when once a religion has obtained an ascendency, so as to become the established one of the state, the desire of conforming to fashion will induce many, who are not converts from principle, to profess themselves its members; and, as those, who are "without," have no test, by which they can separate the true from the pretended disciple, it is no wonder, that an argument, from which so much might naturally be expected, has, in fact, produced so little.

That the disgrace of this circumstance is not to be charged on Christianity itself, but that its sincere disciples must ever bear the mark of distinction assigned

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to them in the text, will be sufficiently evident from considering the direct *tendency* of that religion to promote benevolence.

I. It tends to this, in the *first* place, by manifesting, in the clearest view, the *love of God towards the human race.* The redemption of the world, by the humiliation, sufferings, and death of Christ, is such an evidence of the interest, which the Deity takes in the happiness of mankind, as cannot fail greatly to affect all, who sincerely believe it. When we consider, that the Son of God underwent so much, that the miseries of men might at present be lessened, and at length entirely removed, the direct conclusion is, that we never can be employed so acceptably to God, as when, in imitation of him, we are engaged in benevolent designs. The argument of St. John is undoubtedly a good one, and will not fail of making a due impression on every

grateful mind. "Beloved, if God *so* loved us, we ought also to love one another." If God so loved us, as to send his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, that we might be delivered from the *dominion* and *punishment* of sin, it certainly is incumbent upon us, as we would not show ourselves unworthy of that grace, to manifest our sense of it by an imitation of the goodness, which gave rise to it. Knowing the purpose of our Saviour's coming, it would, according to our power, be to frustrate the counsels of God, if we did not cultivate in ourselves the disposition, which will lead us to co-operate in its furtherance, and rejoice in its accomplishment.

II. *Secondly*, the Christian religion has a tendency to promote benevolence, by making it the *qualification of our happiness*. Though it may be contended, that, in this respect, Christianity does but re-echo the voice of nature, since reason tells

tells us, that the malevolent never can be happy; yet it is certain, that, by showing us more clearly the nature and duration of the happiness of which we are capable, Christianity has at least the merit of making us more attentive to what reasons utters. Were it not for the considerations, which *religion* presents to us, we should not be sufficiently sensible *how important* a benevolent disposition is to our happiness. And though, from the *pleasure* we experience from benevolence, we may easily collect, that, in cultivating benevolence, we are acting *according to nature*, and consequently pursuing our own happiness; yet it is religion alone, that can enable us to overcome the *impediments* to its cultivation, which are perpetually occurring. While our attention is confined to the *present* scene of things, it must often happen, that the advantages we aim at are incompatible with the good of others, and it may be our interest to *suppress* the sentiment of love to man, which

which would otherwise spontaneously arise. Indolence, appetite, or passion will ever be drawing back our regard to ourselves; and there are few, who, looking only to the *present* life, have strength of mind enough to act upon that enlarged plan, on which happiness, to be permanent, must be built. But, when we extend our view to the prospects, which Christianity opens to us, and consider ourselves as candidates for an *eternity* of happiness, of which none but the benevolent can partake, our temporal interests, far from being thought worthy to hinder us of such a prize, become too trivial to be admitted into the comparison, and appear but as the dust of the balance. Our religion assures us, that the production and increase of happiness is the Almighty's plan; and he has wisely provided, in order to its completion, that happiness, once produced, should reverberate, in sympathetic joy, from heart to heart. To act in concert with this gracious

cious plan, and indeed, so far as ourselves are concerned, to give it effect, it is necessary, that we cultivate *sentiments* of benevolence; since it is only by these, that we can enjoy the happiness of others. To him, whose mind is rightly set in this respect, the happiness of people in the most distant regions, from which a knowledge of it can reach him, is a source of pleasure; and his pleasure is of such a nature, that it will doubtless be increasing from age to age. When, in the full disclosure of the divine dispensations, scenes of pure and extensive happiness shall be displayed, how different will be the effects of them on the *malignant* and on the *benevolent* mind! Miserable will *he* then be, to whom calamity has been able to afford pleasure, or whom the misfortune even of an enemy has made to rejoice. The universe, we may safely pronounce, taken as a whole, abounds with *good*. Evil can obtain but partially, and in an inferior degree; and even that will,

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at length, be so diminished, as to bear no sensible proportion to the good. The more, therefore, our views are extended, the more shall we be affected with joy or with envy, at the sight of expanding happiness, according to the previous disposition of the mind. Thus, the command to "rejoice with them that do rejoice," is one, which we ought to prepare ourselves to observe, were it only on the principle of *self-love*, and of consulting our own gratification. The dark pleasures of malignity, though enjoyed in this vale of misery for a season, will hereafter lose their objects. The time will come, when "sorrow and sighing shall flee away;" and he, who looked for gratification in the miseries of others, will find, to his confusion, that happiness prevails.

III. *Thirdly*, the Christian religion still further tends to promote benevolence, by making it the *condition* of our happiness. However we may overlook the necessity, arising

arising from the nature of things, of qualifying ourselves for the enjoyment of heaven, by forming previous dispositions suitable to the happiness of heaven, we cannot deceive ourselves with respect to the positive condition of being *admitted* into it. Now there is nothing, which Christianity more clearly insists on, than that none but the benevolent can be admitted. Without obedience to the precepts of the Gospel, we cannot reasonably hope for the rewards, which the Gospel conditionally holds out to us; and almost every one of its precepts may justly be considered as a branch of benevolence. "The end of the commandment is *charity*." Love, varied according to the objects of it, is the highest principle, which the Gospel aims to excite in us; and, when we feel it in a due degree towards God and man, proportionable to the relation, which we bear to each, we have complied with the *condition* of the Gospel, and are as perfect as our nature will

will permit us to be. Christ himself has declared, that all the particulars of our duty are comprehended in the principle of *love*. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

It is, indeed, with great propriety, that our Saviour has made benevolence the distinguishing mark of his disciples *here*; for it is that, by which he himself will distinguish them *hereafter*. In the account, which he has given us, of his intended procedure at the day of judgement, we are told, that this will be the test, by which he will separate the righteous from the wicked. It is not possible, that it can be more expressly declared, than in that account, that the doing good

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to others, out of a principle of love, is the indispensable condition of being admitted into Christ's kingdom. He has also, to enforce the performance of this condition, interwoven, with the other inducements to perform it, the strong feeling of *gratitude*. If we have a due sense of the obligations we owe to Christ, we should doubtless embrace every opportunity of showing it, by doing offices of kindness to him in his *own person*, were he capable of wanting or receiving them. But, as this is impossible, he has graciously promised, whoever may be the object of the kindness, which we exercise for *his sake*, to consider the debt of gratitude as properly discharged. He will approve and reward the righteous, because, from the love excited by his example, and cultivated at his command, they have done acts of kindness to his brethren; and he will condemn and punish the wicked, because they have neglected to do them, and have lived insensible, from the want

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of benevolent sentiments, of their *obligation* to do them; a plain indication, that, as benevolence, considered as a principle of conduct, implies all that he requires of us, so the *want* of it, independently of positive offences, will be a failure, for which nothing can compensate.

Thus does Christianity, by the nature of the condition, on which it promises us admission into heaven, kindly make our duty and our interest to unite. It might have pleased God to make some painful services, from which no further purpose should be answered, the condition of admitting us into his kingdom; but he has only directed us to acquire the disposition, which is a necessary qualification of our enjoying the happiness of it, when we *are* admitted.

Since then the Christian religion, by shewing us the interest, which God takes in the happiness of men, and by making

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our imitation of him, in his kindness towards them, both the *qualification* and the *condition* of our own happiness, has taken such precautions for the cultivation of benevolence, it is with great reason, that it *expects* us to cultivate it, and that it lays claim to the honour of having its disciples *distinguished* by their love to one another.

If it be inquired *how* we may most effectually cultivate it, the answer must be, by the practice of *doing good.* He, who would be thoroughly kind in his *sentiments*, must be frequent in benefitting by his *actions.* This is the method, which Christ has pointed out by his precepts, and recommended by his example. At first, perhaps, we may do good offices to others, in obedience to the precepts of our religion, without being sensible of that kindness and good-will, which is necessary to constitute the true Christian. But let us not be discouraged. Principles

and practice have a mutual influence on each other. If our practice be right, it will not fail, by degrees, to improve the principles, from which it proceeded; and he who, at first, was beneficent in pure obedience to command, because he knew it was pleasing to God, will soon have the additional inducement to be so from a principle of love, and because it is grateful to himself.

We see, therefore, the necessity, if we would be the true disciples of Jesus Christ, of following him in that part of his character, by which no other founder of a religion has been distinguished, the *going about doing good.* Far from being backward to embrace the opportunities, which are thrown in our way of cultivating that temper, by which alone he will acknowledge us to be *his,* we should, under the guidance of discretion, diligently *seek* for them. Since, by the over-ruling power of a benevolent God, happiness

happiness will at last preponderate, let us be careful to lay the foundation of happiness to ourselves, by being disposed to rejoice in its diffusion; nor let us, by indulging in habits of a contrary nature, be left in the number of those malignant few, to whom the sight of happiness will be painful.

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